

### Teaching Empires: Gender and Transnational Citizenship in Europe

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# Teaching Empires

Gender and Transnational Citizenship in Europe

A book series by ATHENA

Edited by Mary Clancy and Andrea Pető



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Mary Clancy and Andrea Pető

**Teaching Empires.  
Gender and Transnational Citizenship in Europe**

Teaching with Gender. European Women's Studies in  
International and Interdisciplinary Classrooms.

A book series by ATHENA

© *Ruined Big House, Ireland: Tyrone House, late 18th century. Cover photograph by Mary Clancy*

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## Foreword

Teaching Empires is a teaching text intended for undergraduate and post-graduate learning in a range of diverse geographical settings. The core focus is on the practical and reflective trying out of ideas and questions. Mindful of the implications for teaching, authors have constructed and included learning exercises, extracts and information. The scope of the text, reflecting the interests of the Athena working group, is limited to selected thematic and imperial examples. However, the value of the text is its analytical focus on learning exercises and reflections. It is about teaching and, as such, classroom exercises are not bound by the specifics of imperial or national location. Authors advise a comparative approach and readers may usefully adapt questions, methodologies and exercises to treat their own imperial experiences and histories. Similarly, readers and students may refine questions according to local needs, case-studies or research perspectives. There are no prescribed boundaries.

In order to maintain a focus on teaching, we have endeavoured to keep endnotes to a minimum. However, where omitting endnotes is unrealistic, authors have cited secondary sources in individual chapters. In addition, the Dictionary section and the Bibliography offer further important suggestions, prompts, information and readings to guide the teacher and student. The various chapters are designed to report the reflective thinking of scholars and practitioners who engage with the question of gender and empire in the classroom. In recognising the value of visual sources as a resource, we are especially pleased to be able to introduce original images, using photographs taken by the authors or acquired from family or private archives. This offers a fresh layer of teaching possibility and research materials. The working language of the group and *Teaching Empires* is also a linguistic marker of empire and we acknowledge the additional task of writing in a language that is not the first language of the authors. In doing so, we aim to retain the individual nuances of how English is spoken and written in this shared discursive space.



## **Acknowledgements**

The editors wish to acknowledge the contributions of Margarita Maria Birriel Salcedo, Granada and Patricia Chiantero-Stutte, Bari, members of the working group who also participated in meetings, teaching and conferences. We also wish to thank students who have participated on courses, trying out gender and empire teaching materials. We value the advice and expertise of Izabella Agardi, Vivienne Batt, Gillian Browne and Noemi Kakucs. We wish to acknowledge the support of the Athena network, the co-ordination office at the University of Utrecht, the Series Editors and the helpful advice of the anonymous reviewers. We are also indebted to the Central European University, Budapest and the National University of Ireland, Galway for material support and to the EU Socrates Programme for financial support. We are especially thankful to archivists, authors, librarians, publishers and individuals for generously sharing knowledge, texts, photographs, insights and information. Finally, we wish to thank the contributors for generously sharing their ideas and perspectives on how to teach the complex question of gender and empire.

## Introduction

*Mary Clancy, Andrea Pető*

The idea of Teaching Empires originated during the 6th Gender Research Conference in Łódź, Poland, when *Teaching with Memories* (2006) was launched by Working Group 1b4 Athena 2. The book has been a success in European teaching and a third printing (2007) is distributed internationally by Syracuse University Press. Many contributors felt that their deep commitment to teaching and a good working atmosphere needed a new project. Since then, the Working Group, Teaching Empires, met at the annual Athena meetings in Budapest in 2006 and in Madrid in 2007. Members of the working group devised teaching exercises, shared local experiences and memories of empire, made presentations of their teaching materials and drew upon the commentary and questions of peers. An important first step, for instance, was to devise an inventory of courses on empire being taught in higher education.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to funding from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and co-sponsorship by the Centre for Gender Studies at Stockholm University, the group was given the opportunity to have an extra workshop on “Women and Transnational Citizenship: Researching Teaching Empires” at Stockholm University, in May 2008. The workshop was also dedicated to preparing for the teaching at the Central European University in Budapest in the autumn term of 2008. In Budapest, over the course of the autumn term, members of the Working Group offered a course, “Women and Transnational citizenship, Teaching Empires”, to post-graduate students of gender. Exploring the internet as a site for teaching at the CEU, we developed a moodle e-learning platform where we uploaded the teaching material as well as films connected to the themes of the course. Students were required to address one film in relation to their chosen topic in the final paper in order to ensure that the visual was represented.

The subject of gender and empire is potentially enormous, and it is a field that is generating exciting and imaginative research internationally. A focus on gender introduces not only one but rather multiple ways of investigating the nature of territorial, ideological, political, religious and social acquisition and control in the past. So, too, in Teaching Empires, the important question

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<sup>1</sup> Inventory available for: Estonia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

is to consider how gender mattered in the workings of European historical and contemporary imperial contexts.

The editors and contributors to this volume are united in their intellectual curiosity to find new sources for teaching and new approaches in thinking critically about the complexities of the imperial European heritage. The working group is an international one with disparate experiences of imperial authority, both remembered and experienced, distant and recent. Authors and editors are from a variety of disciplinary, research and professional backgrounds, ages, types of employment and funding. The process of working together, discussing, reflecting, writing and teaching, in meetings and electronically, has strengthened the group as a community of scholars. Such work, across a range of European political and social contexts, offers an important and successful model of university and civic co-operative engagement.

What is the relationship between gender and empire? How will a focus on gender offer up new knowledge about concepts of empire? A defining purpose of Teaching Empires is to generate the space to ask and explore such questions. It is to encourage a critical questioning of imperial effort, as remembered, displayed, forgotten, mythologized or obscured in local and comparative contexts. It is also a teaching and research work in progress, as scholars from different parts of Europe think about new ways of approaching an established subject of international remit. It is about using art, film, novels, diaries, personal memories, textiles, the household, artefacts, museums and photographs to explore imperial ingenuities and subtleties. It is about showing how the ordinary, the obvious, the invisible and the ignored matters when trying to understand and explain conflicts, oppression, survival, subversion and broken memories. It is our essential aim, then, that Teaching Empires will become an important resource for students of gender studies who are interested in establishing critical research perspectives, identifying new sources and generating new knowledge about contested and complex territories of gender and empire.

Budapest-Galway, 10 January 2009

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## The Ripples of Empire as Exemplified in Mary Lavelle and Broken English

*María S. Suárez Lafuente*



Figure 1: 'Mary Lavelle' Photograph by María Suárez Lafuente

The aim of this article is to provide evidence of how the imperialist idea is so well intertwined with the notion of patriarchy that it can construct women both as passive or active, but always within its realm. *Broken English* is an example of the former, and the nannies in *Mary Lavelle* of the latter. This proposition is backed with such criticism as seemed appropriate to the target class: undergraduate students. Even so, the argument can be easily adapted to secondary school students.

**empire:** supreme and wide (political) dominion; absolute control; government in which sovereign is called emperor; territory of an emperor. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. 1964.

The quotation given above is the first meaning that appears in the official definition of the concept we want to teach: Empire. Students are asked to analyze the nature of the words that make up the definition, where nouns such as *dominion* and *control* are reinforced by *supreme* and *absolute*, leaving no

doubt about the meaning of *empire*. In the second half of the definition we find that there is the possibility of an *emperor*, ruling according to the standards set in the previous sentences. It is easy to find examples of empires and sovereigns not only in history but also in literature. Students can surely provide the names of a few empires/emperors and their deeds, which helps the class to find adjectives for the term and reflect on it. That done, the question is: can we say that there are empires/emperors in contemporary society? In order to answer this question we should restrict the territory to Western culture, because, as we shall see later, contemporary *empires* are heavily loaded with cultural inscriptions. A first step towards working with these notions is to substitute “empire” for “patriarchy” and “emperor” for “patriarch” and verbalize the undercurrent of gender trouble that runs through our contemporary societies.

At first glance, (political) circumstances in the Western world do not comply with the definition of *empire*: neither *supreme dominion* nor *absolute control* can be sustained throughout. But further critical developments of the concept have made the word *empire* evolve into *imperialist*, which widens the range of influence of the term and also its possibilities of action. Students should ponder on the change implied in moving from the noun *empire* to the adjective *imperialist*, and we should make them notice that while the first is a given, the second is, precisely, that given “in movement”, enacted by a subject with a will to dominate and control. This will to enact the *empire* is so deeply inscribed in Western culture that it surfaces already in the first written texts, in the dichotomist “reading” of the world, where one sex, one attitude, one belief or one race prevails over another. The fact that everybody wants to be in the empowered part of the dichotomy accounts for the development of myths, genesis<sup>2</sup> and otherwise, that will naturalize the imperialist idea. This is a good moment to make students reflect on their own notions of superiority in respect to nation, language, religion or genealogy, since these are the pillars of imperialism, colonialism and their derivatives.

Individual reflection shows that the imperialist drive is alive and thriving, and has always been so. We build our identity, initially, around the notions just mentioned; we then invest them with vital importance and create a myth (a narrative) to support our right to defend them – or to impose them even by force, as happens in the most vitiated examples of imperialism.

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<sup>2</sup> *genésico* in Spanish

Those mythical narratives are the backbone of the *empire*, because they do not only justify any action, but serve also to convince us of our righteousness. The Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch puts these ideas in a nutshell in the following sentence, which I often use in my classes to encourage students to ponder the nature and consequences of any discourse: “Fiction will make us real.”<sup>3</sup>

That is, human beings need a discourse that will validate actions and deeds that would be otherwise nonsensical. In so doing, they establish a social order and a set of priorities that predefine roles and functions for people to the extent that discourse is turned into “reality”, and so challenging that discourse/reality dichotomy becomes, socially, nonsensical. This is how women are compelled to accept patriarchal norms as the Truth. Since this is the underlining thought of my argument in analysing both novel and film, the oxymoron should be discussed in class and related to the ideas mentioned above. Teaching *Empires* is a complex subject, albeit basic, so it is important that the class does not lose the thread that leads us through it.

While we are cosily surrounded by our “pillars of identification”, we do not need to resort to notions of empire. It is when we are displaced, out of our familial entourage, away from our country, that we see our identity in danger and feel insecure. Then we feel the need to reinforce the myths that explain what we are and what we did. Homi Bhabha provides some concepts that exemplify and clarify such a situation; they point not only to such features present in historical accounts but also to those that have become increasingly common in contemporary society:

**dissemiNation:** is a term based on Jacques Derrida’s *dissemination*. Its point is to show that what might define a nation is disseminated not only in its physical features and boundaries but also in what we understand as its traits, characteristics, and deeds. We take our “nation” with us wherever we go, and it develops with us, fuses with our new experiences, and although it always refers back to our natal nation it is not *it*, but a nation dissemiNated. Nevertheless, we defend it and long and grieve for it, and resort to the following concept to make it – our *nation* – vivid, to help its survival.

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<sup>3</sup> Aritha Van Herk, *A Frozen Tongue* (Sydney, Australia and Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1992), 34.



**na(rra)tion.** Actually, this is what life is about. Ask students to compare Kroetsch's sentence, "fiction will make us real", with Bhabha's term "na(rra)tion", so that they can see by themselves that we are all part of a cultural continuum. This should make them aware of the possibility of falling inadvertently into the trap of imperialism.

I found one of the best examples of this awareness in Zadie Smith's novel *White Teeth* (2000). One of the main characters, Alsana, a woman who comes to England as an Indian wife, muses over the fears that both migrants and locals entertain, namely that their nations will dissolve in difference:

It makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, *disappearance*. Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat (genetically BB; where B stands for Bengali-ness) marrying someone called Sarah (aa, where a stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (Ba), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (aa), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren (Aaaaaa!), their Bengali-ness thoroughly diluted.<sup>4</sup>

This quotation offers multiple possibilities of analysis with students, such as irony, history, biology and dissemination. This last term is very useful when trying to understand how meaning extends through time and space and is always on the move, making of "superiority" an unstable term on which we are advised not to stand. But humanity is prone to consider a very narrow range of existence at any one time, so we feed our identity on being superior and right-ful in the short run. This attitude generates, by definition, both sameness and exclusion, two basic concepts in the making of an empire.

History determines that the nineteenth century was the time in which contemporary empires thrived. That might be so, but the practice of imperialism is not extinct; it is only that nowadays empires are re-enacted through different means. Our dis/located and, therefore, frustrated selves need to find

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<sup>4</sup> Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2000), 272.

an Other to despise, but, since the epic times are over, imperialist actions and discourses become mere mimicry of what (political) empires once meant.

Displaced people **mimic** the centre they derive from:

not out of a desire to be accepted, adopted and absorbed (Edward Said)  
not to invest themselves with power to threaten the colonizers (Homi Bhabha)  
but to pretend that they are superior to the Other, however weak their own position is.

Students should consider these ideas carefully, because mimicry is a common action in everyday life: we invest ourselves with fake power in order to try to ignore our lack of self-esteem. But the move is so obvious, it is so difficult to deceive ourselves with that device, that we cannot help but enact it either with anger or even violence. Therefore, it is dangerous, above all for ourselves and often for others as well.

We will consider two examples of such mimicry. One is the community of nannies in Kate O'Brien's novel *Mary Lavelle* (1936); the other is the Croatian family in Gregor Nicholas' film *Broken English* (1996). Both groups are displaced and disempowered due to diverse circumstances, and both groups try to gain some self-esteem by emphasizing their origins: the British Empire and Europe. The flaw is that they do not consider how those very places they kowtow to, are the ones that have expelled them from their bosom, forcing them to leave. This is clear evidence that the power of imperialism is such that it creates such paradoxes, or "ripples", which are stronger the closer they are to the centre of power. Before we move into an analysis of both novel and movie, students should ponder this paradox and the associated image (the ripples of empire).

*Mary Lavelle*

A novel by Kate O'Brien, Ireland, 1936

Reading: Chapter 4, "San Geronimo"

The nannies depicted in this chapter are a highly disempowered group: they are colonized in origin, since they are Irish, and so, in 1922, still within the domain of the British Empire. They are exiled because they are poor and cannot support themselves in their own country, and because they are female they have access to a very limited number of jobs. Thus, they are nannies not out of choice but out of necessity. In spite of all this, they mimic the British imperial discourse – in their language, in their gestures, and in their opinions.

Even though they are nannies for the children of the industrial "aristocracy" of Altorno (a literary name for Bilbao, Spain), they occupy a subordinate position, since they can barely survive on what they earn. Altorno's *good* society manages to invisibilize them, doing so by, for instance, referring to them by their last names. Thus the nannies are not "women", they are merely "misses", and they are made to wear a "decent English suit" and to put no make up on. That is, they have been made into images of the House they work for; they have been reified, and have lost, therefore, their own individual identity.

Because they are aware of their position and resent it, they become a close-knit group, in order to protect themselves in their helplessness. Café Alemán becomes their fortress. They explain their situation with a derogative, but threatening sentence: "We of the underworld make a home from home of it." This strategy is, in itself, dangerous because there are no natural connections among them; all they have is a "common enemy" that threatens their national and gendered identity, and this in itself is more than enough to trigger resistance.

Throughout the fragment from *Mary Lavelle* we find sentences such as "they give us an awful life", which reflects our point, since "us" is in a weak position, that of the object. The Altorno misses see no other way out of their situation than to learn to mimic the strategic imperial discourse, reversing the proposition:

them vs. us

This sentence is the key to imperialist discourse because it marks the two groups needed in the imperialist proposition, and the relationship stated between the two: **them** is bad, **us** is good. So the nannies insist that *their* accent is awful, *ours* is perfect; *their* food is unhealthy, not so *our* good English breakfast; Spaniards are barbarians, we are civilized, and so on. This faulty logic breaks the pretension of imperialism and leaves the nannies exposed because it moves from a statement that might be wrongly perceived to an accumulation of errors that marks such thought as grotesque.

Keeping the previous ideas in mind, students might be asked to explain, in personal terms, the following sentence, given by the nannies at the end of the chapter we are considering: “We are treated like dirt.”

A possible reading of the sentence is to notice that it confirms the nannies as passive entities, devoid of power and reified, in spite of their being in the position of the subject (we) – because it is a passive subject. The second term of the comparison (dirt) shows that they are only a step away from feeling down and grotesque, “damned spinsters” and lonely, on the threshold of a nervous breakdown. That is, they are the victims twice over: they are displaced from their centre and they fight, through desperate mimicry, against the wrong enemy, as they have been taught to do by an imperialist society.

### *Broken English*

A film by Gregor Nicholas, New Zealand, 1996

This is the story of a Croatian family exiled to New Zealand as a result of the Balkans War. More precisely, it is the story of a Croatian father exiled to New Zealand with his family. Discuss with students the implications of the difference between these two sentences, as they are the axis of the movie.

Once settled, the father, as patriarch of the family, mimics one of the key imperialist ideas: the primacy of Europe over any other territory, which equals, by definition, the primacy of white people over coloured people. Therefore, he and his sons look down on Maoris, Asians and any other minorized group – even though, as Croats, they are in similar circumstances, being newcomers to the country who have not mastered the common language: English. Again, we find the same flaw made by the Irish nannies: although they may be powerless and unempowered, nevertheless those coming from an imperialist background will enact the empire anew, given the least opportunity.

Until very recently the white European male has owned females politically, economically and socially. Even though culture has been translated from Europe to the antipodes, the Croatian males find that proposition very handy, since even now, in twentieth-century New Zealand, it is easier to exercise power over women than over male Maoris. This is especially true for a new-comer expatriate, even if he feels he is from “a superior culture”.

Consequently, the daughter in the family, who falls in love with a Maori man, suffers even physical enclosure under the domain of the Croatian males; she is imprisoned within her family circle and banished to her room. Father and brothers believe they have *received* power over her by the sheer reason of their gender. It is, again, the rule of the Empire over minorized groups: women and coloured people. Coloured women are, therefore, at the very bottom of the ladder. Although this is not the case in *Broken English*, it is important to remind students of it, because they are bound to come across many such examples in the course of their studies.

The power of the European father has been diminished just by the fact of moving from his country to his exile: he was the confirmed patriarch in his culture, but now he is an immigrant who masters neither the language nor the customs of the receiving land. This fact forces him to look for a discourse that will allow him to maintain some of his self-esteem and will back his faulty reasoning in matters that concern his grown-up daughters. He resorts to the patriarchal myth of the female as the sacred totem of the race. In this case his daughter is sacralised as the white woman of the white race. It is important that students analyse, at this point, the “meaning” of women in their own culture, so that they are able to point out the flaws of patriarchal thought. To this end, we provide them with the meaning of *totem* in contemporary culture.

**totem:** an image, an object or a concept that is made to represent the qualities (physical or moral) of the group or community that chooses to convey such characteristics on them, in an act of sacralisation

Women move on the margins of our patriarchal societies. They are not subjects in their own communities; nor can they be compared to “them”, because they are subservient to “us”. So, they move in a space of un/definition, of hybridism, of change.

In *Broken English* women are clearly totems of a “lost” homeland, a homeland that is impossible to recover because it is already being changed in the mere act of remembrance. The males of the Croatian family want to preserve their *croatianness* by keeping their women under the thumb, not allowing them to marry anybody outside their European circle, still less to have an affair with a Maori man. This is counterattacked in the film by the Maori totem: a bush that carries the meaning of linking the Maoris to New Zealand soil. The European totem lacks force, because the circumstances inherent to the new space have transformed the daughter into an independent woman, who, along with the English language, has learnt new ways of life and the importance of the rights of individuals. So, we can say that the Maori totem wins, because it is deeply rooted in the New Zealand soil, has made it its own, and knows how to move within the laws of the new country.

### ***Conclusion***

This brings us back to the endless discussion of “nation” and its na(rra)tion, since a totem, defined along the lines given above, can be a possible starting point for a reworking of that concept. Take up the point again with students, and have them ponder whether they have received new insights into both “nation” and “empire”. To that end, the following quotation may be enlightening:

The concept of **nation** is equivalent to gender, genealogy, and skin color – all those things that are not chosen and, because of their inevitability, awake in us a sense of belonging and of sacrifice.<sup>5</sup>

The main idea underlying this analysis of *Broken English* is that empire, as a concept, travels through time and space. We take it along among our cultural values and inscriptions, and we are remiss to let go of it, because we understand it as a sign of our identity. The “sense of belonging” to nation and empire gives people a standpoint from which to elaborate a discourse that will feed longing, self esteem, personalized icons and even totems. It is the sense “of sacrifice” that could incite people to action of a violent kind, the kind that needs reinforcement through myth and totems, the kind that is always directed against the Other, against Them.

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<sup>5</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, “Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20 (1991): 431

The enactment of imperialism has been staged again with different actors: the nannies in the novel *Mary Lavelle*, in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, and the Croatian family in the film *Broken English*, at the end of the century and in New Zealand. Ask students to relate both situations to the new characteristics of nation and empire, and, by extension, gender, they have learnt about in the previous paragraph.

The outcome of misplaced imperialism, or the desperate mimicry of a lost imperial centre, feeds imperialist and patriarchal policies: it makes people direct their anger towards the wrong target, while It, the Empire, acts as a demiurge from the peak of the pyramid of power.

***What steps can be taken to subvert such a mistaken and dangerous attitude?***

A step towards unmasking such policies could be to deconstruct the imperialist discourse with analyses such as the ones we have conducted above, in order to find the flaws of patriarchy, so that we are then enabled to reconstruct individualities with a subjective capacity. But it is important to recognize the difficulty of such a procedure, for different reasons. There are people without a voice (subalterns) that lack the tools to proceed to that stage, and there are those that are almost irretrievably caught between mimicry and spite, to the benefit of the Empire.

In order to join forces against empires that hinder us from being, first and foremost, individuals, ask students to find other such examples, in film or literature. They should simply refer to a movie they have seen or a book they have read in recent weeks, and then:

- Proceed with the same analysis.
- Compare results.
- Are the results always so devastating?
- Is there a story of success among minorized people?
- Is such success isolated or is it a possibility for the future?

A summary of the final accounts, or a joint answer to the questions stated above, can make us aware of the strength of the inscription of imperialist ideas in our white, European selves.

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## The Vasa Museum – Reflections on a Privileged Narrative about Empire

*Annika Olsson*



Figure 2: Ropes and Timber (at the Vasa). Photograph by Mary Clancy

When you start thinking about museums and their relationship to empires of different kinds it soon becomes clear to you (if you did not know it already) that museums are very important to empires. Without museums or comparable institutions there could be no empires, since a very important part of being an empire is displaying yourself as a great nation, if not the great(est) nation. And the same goes for museums – much of what makes a museum a museum is related to the fact that the story of the museum as an institution is closely related to the history of the nation state and European imperialism.

I am, of course, exaggerating – but only a bit. As Benedict Anderson has shown, museums were and are a very important part of imagining and communicating yourself as a nation.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, studying the narratives about empires offered in and by different kinds of museums and archives is an excellent way to:

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

- Attain knowledge on empires in general and specific empires in particular
- Understand the identity of a country or nation and how this identity is constructed
- Analyse what gender has to do with all of it

In this paper we are going to take a closer look at the Vasa Museum in Stockholm, Sweden. According to its own website, the museum displays “the world’s only surviving seventeenth-century ship and one of the foremost tourist sights in the world” ([www.vasamuseet.se](http://www.vasamuseet.se)). What can we learn about empires, nation states and gender by analysing the narrative of this museum?

### ***What is a museum – what is an archive?***

But where do we start, if we are going to use museums or archives as a way of studying or investigating empires? Of course it all depends on what kind of classroom you are in, who your students are and the learning outcomes. But in my experience as a teacher of different subjects such as gender studies, comparative literature and rhetoric and with students from different disciplines including undergraduates and post-graduates, you can usually use the same basic questions: It is the answers that differ, depending on where and from what position you ask them.

One of the first questions you have to ask yourself, and to make visible in the classroom and for students, is: what is a museum or archive? A good way to start finding the answer to this question is to search for the answer in a respectable source of knowledge, an encyclopaedia or a dictionary.

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* online describes a museum as

- 1a: “In the ancient Hellenic world: a building connected with or dedicated to the Muses or the arts inspired by them; a university building.”
- 1b: “A building, or part of a building, dedicated to the pursuit of learning or the arts; a scholar’s study.”
- 2a: “A building or institution in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are preserved and exhibited.”

And the *OED* online describes an archive as a “place in which public records or other important historic documents are kept”.

What becomes absolutely clear in these descriptions is that a museum is a very important place, since it is dedicated both to significant learning and to the preservation of historical artefacts of cultural interest. The same is true for archives: the description underlines that an archive is a place for essential records/documents. What the *OED* does not explain to us is who decides what is important or of interest. These are questions you have to ask yourself and that are closely related to critical questions of ownership and authorship in general – not least from a gender perspective.

For sure, using the *OED* is only one way of trying to find an answer. To dig deeper into the discourse of what constitutes a museum or an archive, would be to compare different kinds of encyclopaedias in different languages and published in different periods of time and by different organisations. It would also entail investigating research on museums and archives. To actually do research would be the next step – even though in a teaching situation this is usually impossible.

When, however, you are standing in the classroom, a further consideration is that in today’s informational technological society museums and archives can be found both in the so-called real world and on the web. This opens up new opportunities for us as teachers and students, since we are able to visit and use museums and archives without actually going to another country or town. These new opportunities also mean that there are different kinds of versions of museums and archives. The museums and archives we meet in real life are not the same as those we encounter on the net. Therefore we also have to consider this in the teaching situation and ask questions like:

- What are the differences between “real” museums and museums on the internet?
- What are the similarities between the different versions of museum?
- How does this affect the knowledge we produce?

### ***Key concepts: Narrative, empire and gender***

There are also several other significant questions to ask yourself and students before you start to look into the actual narrative. Certainly, you have to reflect upon what it is that you are analysing and what key concepts are used. Depending on what students you are working with you can either follow the same procedure and use the same source, the OED, as a starting point for a discussion focusing on the different concepts, or you can turn everything around and start using, for instance, Wikipedia. What is important is not the source in itself, but that you have a description of the concept that is vital for your analysis and that you open up a reflexive and critical discussion in the classroom about the concept itself, the description of the concept, and the source of the description – be it the OED or Wikipedia.

If you look up the term narrative in the OED online, you find the following definition: “An account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account.” It is a very basic and functional description that underlines the fact that narratives make sense of things and bring the world into order. It is also a description that can open up a discussion about the importance of narratives as tools in identity-making – both regarding the identity of nations and of individuals. It is a description that one can use both with students who are well acquainted with narratology and with students who have never thought about narratives in a critical and analytical way.

Naturally, you also have to clarify your understanding of the concept of empire; depending on what empire you are investigating, this may be an interesting task. If you focus, as we are doing in this paper, on an empire (or a nation) that is not usually thought of as an empire, this tells us something about the concept of empire, the discourse on empire and about the actual empire/nation that is subject to your teaching exercise and your analysis. Sweden, for example, is not mentioned as an empire in the article in the OED; instead you find examples such as the Roman Empire, the British Empire and the French Empire: the obvious ones. But if you look at the history of Sweden as a nation it is clear that Sweden was once a great power – a concept very close to empire, even though it differs somewhat.

The era of Sweden as a great power is called “Stormaktstiden” and it occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (1611-1721).

It started with the reign of King Gustav II Adolf (1611-1632) and ended shortly after the fall of King Karl XII (1697-1718). Several factors rendered Sweden a great power during this period:

- Sweden expanded its territory and ruled over territories and people that were not “its own”
- Sweden was very consciously competing with other great powers in Europe
- At the time, the narrative of Sweden as a nation presented Sweden as a great power, an important nation in the world (if not the greatest).

Finally you have to ask yourself about the meaning of a gender perspective. As research in the vast field of gender studies has shown, analysing a narrative from a gender perspective can mean many different things – in part depending on your definition of gender and your theoretical framework. Still, from a general point of view, it means making gender and gender-related questions and problems visible. You can start by asking some basic questions relating to gender:

- How are women and men represented in the story?
- How is the story itself gendered?
- What part does sexuality play in the narrative?

### *A privileged narrative - The Vasa Museum*

Now let us turn to the narrative: The Vasa Museum. It is directly related to Sweden as a great power during the seventeenth century. The artefact the museum is based upon and displaying is the Vasa ship: a warship that was built by the Swedish king, Gustav II Adolf. But it is also directly related to Sweden as a nation today, and this is also why the narrative of the Vasa Museum is a privileged narrative:

- It is a national museum – sponsored by and directly related to Sweden as a nation
- It is one of Sweden’s best-known museums
- It is one of the most popular museums in Sweden and in Scandinavia
- It is a unique museum – displaying an artefact that is unique in the world

The story of the Vasa ship and the Vasa Museum is the following: The warship Vasa was built for battle, being one of the mightiest warships in the world at the time, carrying 64 guns and 300 soldiers. The ship was (and is) an art treasure and a propaganda machine, carrying around 700 sculptures and ornaments whose purpose was to confirm Gustav II Adolf as “the Lion of the North”, as he was known in contemporary Europe. It was commissioned in 1625 and set sail on its maiden voyage on Sunday August 10, 1628. It was a beautiful day and there were crowds of people waiting for this glorious ship to be launched. The ship fired a salute and set off, but only a few minutes later it began to keel over. The Vasa righted herself once, but then keeled over again and sank. The glorious moment had turned into a disaster.

For more than 300 years the ship was missing, buried deep in the mud of Stockholm harbour. In the mid-twentieth century a man by the name of Anders Franzén, a hobby historian, started his quest for the Vasa. In 1956 he found the Vasa ship, and on April 24, 1961 the Vasa rose again after 333 years on the sea bottom. It was a glorious come-back for the Vasa ship. Just as people had gathered at the harbour 300 years earlier, so they came to watch the Vasa ship rise to the surface. In 1962 the first temporary Vasa Museum was opened; tourists could view the ship while it was being preserved. Then, in 1990, the Vasa Museum opened.

### ***Sweden – gender - empire – nation***

How then is the story of Sweden as a great power narrated in and by the Vasa Museum? And how is the narrative gendered? Starting with the narrative, we should ask ourselves the following questions (which are basic questions that could be evolved, elaborated and changed in line with the narrative you are studying):

- When does the story take place, and what is the function of time in the story?
- Where does the story take place, and what is the function of place in the story?
- What are the key events in the story?
- Who are the key actors – or who is the key actor (protagonist) – in the story? What other characters are there and what are their functions?

- What are the main symbols in the story?
- What is the language of the story?
- What are the theme and motive in the narrative?

Applying these questions to the narrative of Sweden as a great power at the Vasa Museum, what do we find?

Starting with time: Both in the real Vasa Museum and on the museum's website it is clear that the narrative takes place at two different times: It is a story of Sweden during the seventeenth century but it is also a story of the modern and contemporary Sweden. Time tells us that Sweden once was a great nation that both could afford and had the knowledge to build such a glorious ship (never mind that it sank), but time also tells us that Sweden is even more glorious as a nation today since it had the scientific and artistic knowledge required to find, rescue, preserve and display this unique artefact – the only one in the world.

The narrative takes place in Stockholm, Sweden, but is also in different ways related to the wider world. Geopolitics is important and made explicit in the narrative that takes place during the seventeenth century. Sweden is related to Europe and to the various kingdoms/nations that the Swedish king, Gustaf II Adolf was competing with at the time. In the narrative of Sweden as a modern and contemporary society, geopolitics is not an issue at all (at the explicit level). At the implicit level, however, place is very important and national symbols are overflowing.

The key events in the story are the following:

1. Building the ship
2. Displaying the ship – a glorious day
3. Sinking of the ship – catastrophe
4. Looking for the ship
5. Finding the ship
6. Rescuing the ship
7. Preserving the ship – building the ship
8. Displaying the ship
9. Rescuing ...(glorious or a catastrophe)



In a way you could say that the story is divided into two stories. The first one concerns the story of Vasa during the seventeenth century and the second one the story of the Vasa during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. What becomes very obvious when you analyse the components of the story and display them like this is that key events or actions are repeated in the story, the story is in a way recycling itself in a loop that has two possible endings: either a glorious one where the story is never ending (a very unreal dream, interesting in itself), or a catastrophic one where the Vasa finally disappears (as she once did). Hope and threat are two important feelings in this story: the hope of a glorious future or the threat of total failure.

The key actors in the story are the following:

- Gustaf II Adolf (king)
- Anders Franzén (discoverer – hero)
- The divers
- Scientists preserving the Vasa

From one perspective Anders Franzén is the most important person, the protagonist of the story. He is also very important to the narrative, since the finding of the Vasa ship is his own doing – he made it by himself, spending hour after hour, day after day, year after year searching for the ship with a home-made device. He is as true a hero as one can find.

There are several important symbols in the story but the most important ones are the Swedish flag and the device with which the ship was found. The Swedish flag appears everywhere in the museum, even in places where it has no real function so to speak – so it is clear that its main purpose in the narrative is to remind the visitor of Sweden: that the ship is Swedish, and that the museum is Swedish. The home-made device that found the Vasa ship is loaded with ingenuity, and by being directly linked to the hero of the story it represents a brave and righteous man's quest for something almost holy in an unholy world. Although it is never spelled out, it is clear that the Vasa Museum tells the visitor a story of Sweden as a glorious nation: this is the theme of the narrative.

Looking at the story from a gender perspective it is obvious that this is a narrative where men and masculinity are very important. First of all, there are almost no women in the story and all the central characters are men. Secondly,

it is a story based on normative masculinity and important masculine coded concepts such as willpower, honour, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quiet strength, stoicism, persistence, adventurousness, independence, dignity. The narrative illustrates Joane Nagel's argument that the makings of modern nations are best understood as masculinist projects:

This is not to say that women do not have roles to play in the making and unmaking of states: as citizens, as members of the nation, as activists, as leaders. It is to say that the scripts in which these roles are embedded are written primarily by men, for men, and about men, and that women are, by design, supporting actors whose roles reflect masculinist notions of femininity and of women's proper 'place'.<sup>2</sup>

Following Nagel it is only logical that the roles left for women in the narrative of the Vasa ship are very peripheral and supporting: One of the corpses found is a woman's corpse – at first mistaken for a young man, since everybody believed there could be no women on the ship. She probably was the wife of somebody working on the ship – which means that her body is reassuring heterosexuality on the ship and in the narrative. Another woman mentioned in the narrative is one of the scientists now working on the ship. And last but not least, let us not forget that the Vasa ship is gendered as a woman. Ships are female beings so to speak. This also means that the most important female coded agent in the story plays a very traditional part. The Vasa ship is not only a valuable object on display; she is also extremely vulnerable: all the king's men and all the king's horses have to serve and protect her.

### ***Conclusion***

What, then, have we learned about empires, national states and gender by analysing the narrative of the Vasa Museum from a gender perspective? Well, for one thing it is obvious that the fact that Sweden was once a great nation is very important in the narrative, and that it is directly related to Sweden as a great nation today. That teaches us that notions of empire can be significant in the creation of national identities even in countries that we do not associate primarily with the concept of empire. Secondly, it is very clear that we have to

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<sup>2</sup> Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and nationalism: gender and sexuality in the making of nations", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 2 (March 1998), 243.

investigate the relationship between masculinity and nationalism further, since it still is very important in narratives of this kind. And third, it shows us how imperative it is to keep asking the question that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler raises: Who sings the nation state?<sup>3</sup>

To conclude, I hope that this article has shown that narratives on empires offered in and by different kinds of museums and archives are excellent to use in teaching empires. And fun.

Go find:

Find a privileged narrative on empire in a public museum or archive. Ask the following questions:

- How is it narrated?
- How is it gendered?
- Why is it a privileged narrative?

Compare different kinds of narratives on empires from different kinds of museums and archives, both “real” and digital ones. Examples of digital archives you can use are You Tube, Wikipedia (s), National Encyclopaedias, National Museums, National Libraries.

- What are the similarities and the differences?
- How important is the medium for the message?
- How important is language?

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<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Who sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2007).

## Plastic Doodads and Synthetic Text(iles). Modernity and the Colonization of the Private in Socialist Eastern Europe

*Izabella Agárdi*



Figure 3: The State-Award winning brigade of the Budapest Pantyhose Factory, in the 1960s  
(Property of Eszter Zsófia Toth, published here with her permission)

### **Prescript – The challenges of researching and teaching “recent past” and empire**

“Teaching empires” in history is not a new phenomenon. It has been part of the Hungarian curriculum at the level of secondary as well as higher education. A survey conducted at three major Hungarian universities has revealed that courses on “empire”, “imperialism”, “colonization” and their different historical formations are being taught, albeit often in “traditional” positivistic fashion, that is, concentrating mainly on political and military history, concentrating on the classical “great” empires (i.e. the British, Spanish, Russian empires) and often maintaining the “home” and “away” dichotomy.<sup>1</sup> Although international historical research since the 1980s has been reformulating imperial his-

<sup>1</sup> The inventory of courses on empires being taught in higher education has been conducted in the framework of the Athena 3 project by members of working group 2A, “Teaching Empires”. It is available online for the following countries: Hungary, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Sweden and Italy. See [http://www.athena3.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=337&Itemid=30](http://www.athena3.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=337&Itemid=30)

tory by reconceptualising such a dichotomy and looking at the ways in which imperial powers themselves were affected by and through interaction with the colonies and how power relations played out not only on racial and ethnic lines but also those of gender and class, nevertheless few of these developments have found their way into teaching on a European scale – as the survey shows. In the East Central European context, because of the recentness of the transition, reflections on and evaluations of Soviet-type domination in the region are still being formed. As the rise of post-structuralism, deconstructive history and new historicism with the accompanying global developments of post-colonial and subaltern studies, gender studies and memory studies preceded the “Fall of the Wall” and end of the bi-polar world order by only a few years, the “official” stance of history has been only modestly and only recently influenced by such tendencies in research and historiography. Scholarly debates on the region’s socialist past, although lively, have been heavily politicized (polarized), and explanations have tended to be holistic and permeated by nostalgia or amnesia.<sup>2</sup> In the East Central European region historians made attempts to analyse the recent past even before 1989 and in the years thereafter. However, a host of archival material became available for research only after 1989, while new approaches (i.e. oral history) and interdisciplinarity began to receive greater emphasis only in the 1990s and around the millennium. Therefore, the analyses have remained contingent; no systematic and nuanced analytical framework(s) have thus far been developed, with which one could analyse the period of state socialism and the so-called “post-socialist condition” or “transition period”. Concepts such as ‘Soviet imperialism’ cannot be taken for granted or as a matter of consensus. Can Soviet domination be regarded as a specific type of imperialism? Can it perhaps be explained as a manifestation of colonialism? In what ways would this be possible? These questions, although highly important and relevant, are still the subject of research. Consequently, they have not really been ‘followed up’ closely in teaching as yet. Therefore, forming a coherent, logical and systematic methodology on such fluid and conceptually contested terrain seems to be a highly challenging enterprise, one that, at this stage, can only be partial.

Before introducing the session, and its purpose, theme and methodology, I shall outline some of the issues, problems and questions that arose in the course of designing the research project and, later on, planning the teaching session

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<sup>2</sup> See Richard S. Esbenshade, “Remembering to Forget: Memory, History, National Identity in Postwar East-Central Europe”, *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995): 72-96.

– which was to be the place for presenting and sharing the knowledge gained in the research process. There were two main groups of problems that cropped up in connection with the chosen topic. First of all, the piece of research that was to be taught itself refers to historical material from the *recent past*, and the research itself was venturing into a largely neglected and unmapped terrain – socialist synthetic production and especially one of its products. This provided at times a chaotic and contradictory pool of information with occasional gaps, thus yielding a highly partial account where claims often had an air of speculation about them. This fact had consequences as to the methodological choices for presenting the material and to its theoretical implications as ‘lessons to learn’. Secondly, an effort to study the material in connection with the Soviet *empire* proved to be necessary, and as such it was not solely a political but also a theoretical choice, further implying methodological issues, knots that had to be untangled along the way. Let me first elaborate on these two issues before turning to the topic at hand.

Teaching about the recent past (“*közel múlt*”), in our present case the 1960s, is necessarily an experimental process, something that ideally cannot be a univocal and monological enterprise in which the researcher-instructor exercises her intellectual authority in a one-directional manner of knowledge transfer. The past, and the recent past even more so, is never a closed, compact set of information, the passing on of which would be without problems of a theoretical or methodological nature. On the contrary, it calls for a highly sensitive attitude and nuanced handling of a host of issues and implications on the part of the instructor, the reasons for which are manifold. Firstly, events, items, dates, people, phenomena that are involved in the teaching process are still living, vivid and often organic parts of often first-hand memories, as well as parts of family histories. This indicates an intricate intertwining of personal experiences, knowledge(s) and larger-scale social, cultural and historical ‘facts’ and the endowment of these with a strong emotive component. To put it bluntly, it is a contested space where conflicting personal memories might underline or dispute and undermine the ‘official’ stance of the historian. This might be a very useful way to interrogate different forms and shapes of cultural memory, but by all means a liberal, open and highly sensitive and dialogical approach to the subject matter is called for where the historian-as-expert on the chosen topic becomes contested as well. Secondly, there is a sense that historical research concerning the recent past is itself multivocal and is also the

subject of change and constant negotiation among historians. Due to a lack of consensus, that is, the official narrative is still in-the-making, the historiography of recent events may be less frozen than the canonized historical knowledge of earlier events or periods with much scholarly literature written about them. To be sure, the story of those events/periods is also being rephrased, reformulated, and *re-narrated*, only perhaps less rapidly. Historical turning points as well as paradigm shifts in the humanities and the social sciences are fertile ground for such reformulations. Rather than allow this tangible multiplicity of voices, experiences, memories, argumentative tones and politically informed discourses to create a disorderly mess, we can exploit them, turning them to the advantage of a more interactive and dialogical teaching method based on “mapping” and careful contextualizing. This is especially beneficial in an environment where students are of diverse backgrounds. It encourages students and instructors to think in multilayered terms, to approach topics from different localized positions (national, gendered, political, cultural), and to compare the differences that inform their ways of looking at, analyzing and evaluating the topic at hand.

As far as theoretical (and methodological) issues relating to researching and teaching the phenomenon of empires and mechanisms of imperialism in history are concerned, they are fundamentally circumscribed by acknowledged correlations between power, history writing and the knowledge produced by the latter. According to Spivak, history is never innocent in reflecting/producing a certain epistemological stance, which in modernity has been pervaded by the phenomenon of imperialism and colonialism. The “narrative of history-as-imperialism”, as she terms historiography, with all its universalizing tendencies has been highly successful because of its systemic nature and because of its built-in Western point of view, from which all things past have been seen, narrated and thus evaluated. As she claims, “the imperialist project created an episteme which ‘means’ and ‘knows’ the colonial subject as ‘history’s nearly-served other’” thereby indicating that “meaning” and “knowing” always intersect power.<sup>3</sup> The first problem lies in how to subvert this otherness. The second problem is at least as challenging as the first: any imperial/colonizing power (as well as the official narrative of national histories) aspires to be perceived as monolithic and linear, and it attempts to efface its underlying hetero-

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<sup>3</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives”, *History and Theory* 24, no. 3 (October 1985): 247

geneity, thereby repressing forms of multivocality. For this reason, researching and teaching empires ideally aspires to bring out and acquire legitimacy for this underlying heterogeneity. Having this theoretical aim in mind, we still face the question of “how is that possible?”. The “narrative of history-as-imperialism”, in which, according to Spivak, Europe figures as “the sovereign subject”, which defines itself by its colonies as “others” has been written and rewritten by several disciplinary discourses. It is hardly easy to position oneself outside of this binary, as one is necessarily deeply implicated in it. Even scholarly attempts at subverting the phenomenon of “Europe and its Others” to “Europe as an Other” have only been partial and have ended up maintaining the binary, constructing “The Third World as a convenient signifier” of everything that Europe is not, thereby reconfirming the very same dichotomy they had set out to undo.<sup>4</sup> Instead of simply shifting the focus and study the colonies as subjugated others, scholarly attention should be shifted towards the *process* of the “worlding” of ‘The Third World’. In Spivak’s words, “[t]o think of the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation helps the emergence of the “Third World” as a signifier that allows us to forget that “worlding”, even as it expands the empire of the discipline.”<sup>5</sup> In this vein, shedding light on this process of “worlding” is exactly what history as a discipline should maintain as its aim. In our present context this problem is only partially ‘solved’, and perhaps only more complicated since “Europe”, as postcolonial discourse has so often preferred to refer to it, has itself never been a single homogeneous entity. Still less has ‘it’ fully possessed ‘a’ historical subject-position. Postcolonial discourse has accomplished a great deal by drawing attention to the ‘production’ of the ‘Third World’ but without the scholarly investigation of different European empires in the past this can only remain a partial project. Moreover, the establishment of the so-called ‘Second World’ within Europe in the twentieth century (the roots of which, however, go back to much earlier than the twentieth century) was yet another large-scale imperial project, the ‘East’ becoming yet another “convenient signifier” for the other within, which if left uninterrogated or jumbled together under ‘Europe’, erases the particularity of those mechanisms and historical processes and leaves them unaccounted for. As literature on Central and Eastern Europe and the

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<sup>4</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, October 1985, 245.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



post-socialist condition has so far not become such a widespread and unified body of work as postcolonial discourse – as mentioned above, no specific theoretical language and analytical framework has been established to give articulation to all those experiences – there have been attempts to draw parallels between the postcolonial and post-socialist condition(s) and borrow from theories already employed by postcolonial discourse. Even so, much mapping, theoretical groundwork and methodological experimentation is needed, if we are to grasp the “worlding” of the ‘East’, ‘the former Eastern bloc’ or ‘the Balkans’ for that matter. The following exercise, which examines one type of European imperialism from a cultural angle, is part of this very project.

In what follows, material for a teaching session will be provided where first a mapping out of the aims, sources, arguments and context will be conducted in order to grasp the relevance, the possibilities and the limits of the approach. This will be followed by excerpts, or “source material”, that can be used in the classroom for illustration and interrogation of the subject at hand and as devices to elicit in-class discussion. This section will be followed by three possible angles of analysis, first placing the phenomenon into a specific context and making the composition of its ‘history’ visible and explicit, second discussing the gendered dimensions of the topic (the gender and intersectionality paradigm), and third discussing its memory (employing frameworks developed in memory studies). A wrapping-up of the ‘lessons’ and the larger-scale implications of the topic will also be provided, drawing conclusions that may also be a matter for discussion. This is made more explicit in the “Concepts to bear in mind” section. Finally, a series of assignments are given, which could be used as in-class or take-home exercises. The short list of readings and the suggested film closing up the “sample teaching material” are preliminary and subject to modification but they are certainly insightful, motivating and helpful in conveying the main points of the “lesson”. It is recommended that they be covered by students *before* the class.

### ***Context – Soviet-type imperialism and Eastern Europe***

The topic of the session was to discuss subtle mechanisms of imperialism, through the cultural and the imaginary as was exemplified by the Soviet empire and its influence in Central and Eastern Europe from the 1960s until the change of regime in 1989 and well after. These macro-processes, however, were set out to be studied through artifacts, clothing and, more specifically,

a special type of housedress for women that became widespread across the “Soviet bloc” in the 1960-70s. As these decades were the heyday of all types of synthetic material (polyester, plastic), production that in the larger global context signified industrial progress and scientific supremacy, the nylon version of this housedress that was especially made for the home is the focus of enquiry. The rationale for this project was provided by the immense popularity that this particular item enjoyed after its debut in the early 1960s – a phenomenon most observable in rural areas of Central and Eastern Europe. Thus far, its popularity has been largely unquestioned, resulting in a naturalization of the presence of these items in everyday life and a seemingly unproblematic influence on cultural memory. The housedress had its different versions throughout Europe during the Cold War era – Hungary (“otthonka”), Poland (“podomka”), Portugal (“bata”), although it did not acquire the same status of significance in the “West” as in the “East”. This, one might assume, already indicates a sort of uniqueness the item itself might signify in the larger social context all over the former socialist bloc, with possible regional variations. To be sure, a comparison of these variations is at the same time important as a means to disrupt the assumed homogeneity of the “bloc”, to see overarching similarities but also to point out differences.

Therefore, my purpose was to highlight everyday items, especially clothing, as carriers of cultural meanings and to do the analysis in the context of the peaceful “battle” fought along the lines of consumer culture within the framework of the Cold War. These cultural meanings, whose patterns Soviet-type imperialist ideology printed on the plastic/synthetic fabric together with the little flowers, suggest that the sphere of the “private” was in no way the sole realm of resistance but more like that which was pervaded by the structure of a bi-polar world and within that Soviet-style imperialism. And these power mechanisms were much more subtle and complex than is indicated by some analyses of the family versus state binary. Even more importantly, they took effect along the axes of gender relations, especially with regard to consumer culture.

My second main argument is that such objects of everyday use now feature as legacies of empire. As they are major elements of cultural memory, the way memory colours them is emblematic of the way memory colours the whole of the era (“socialist consumerism” of state socialism), thereby indicating strands of historical continuity.

The methodology of examining the “housedress-phenomenon” was based on a combination of several empirical data and primary materials. This assemblage of source material involved interviews with rural women in Hungary, Romania and Serbia (collected over a span of two years between 2005 and 2007), the review of several internet sites where it appears or is made reference to, a review of periodicals and magazines published around the time of its “birth” in the 1960s, and a review of documents produced by the Hungarian Ministry of Light Industry, especially those for the years 1964-1968 and 1970. The latter year marked the launch of a nation-wide project of synthetic production, known as the ‘Polyester Program’. The diversity of the primary material facilitated the simultaneous analysis of different sources, the hypothesis being that they might provide a more nuanced understanding of the same phenomenon. However, one also has to bear in mind the medium-specificity of these sources and assess them according to these specificities (e.g. what information they can and cannot give). Moreover, building on such a mosaic of documents, newspaper reports, advertisements and interview fragments enabled a relational analysis of the individual and the collective, the micro and the macro – which is of the utmost importance when studying shifting cultural meanings pervaded by mechanisms of power. The means of handling this vast array of sources was firstly to discuss “the housedress” as an item of clothing and the historical context (Cold War and the socialist project of modernity) which gave rise to its production and finding its way into people’s homes. Next, it was important to touch upon the way it confirmed the ideology of ‘separate spheres’, circumscribing the roles of the ideal socialist female citizen who was “emancipated” only in the party rhetoric of the period. Finally, there is a discussion of the ‘afterlife’ of the housedress and the way it forms a rather significant part of cultural memory, thereby signifying the way the collective positions itself towards its recent past.

### *Excerpts*

1.) Literary: “One day perhaps Traveller will write something about the “otthonka”, about the thing that here and there can be classified as a subspecies for “otthonka”, at the moment he lacks a better word for it, the “otthonka” equals “otthonka”. I’m talking about that front-buttoned, flower-patterned, domestic and running-around

housewife-garment, which according to its status, is a comfortable full-apron with arm-holes (...) One may say that the career of the “otthonka” is not more spectacular, long-lasting or deep-rooted than that of jeans, but perhaps one can compare it to the tracksuit. Although Traveller has seen real “otthonka” stores, it is difficult to make him question his conviction that the “otthonka” is not bought, it just is; it comes into existence by itself, it is born out of regrets, surrender, obligation, resignation, and on one morning it is there as an attribute of the long process of auntification.”<sup>6</sup>

2.) Private memory made public: “My mother’s recurrent phrase, ‘A woman should not be in the kitchen without an apron’ in those days changed to housedress.”<sup>7</sup>

3.) newspaper article: “... our clothes should be chosen in a way that their physical and moral wear and tear should more or less coincide (...) [and] no matter how the individual may want to decide when an item is un-wearable, *there are socially and economically rather promptly circumscribable laws that prevail*. These should be born in mind in production and in trade as well as when influencing consumer demands.”<sup>8</sup> (original emphasis)

4.) magazine: “I like clothes, this may not be a sin. If they are cut out I sew them by myself (...) I am a type that finds it difficult to shop (...) I pay close attention to the harmony of colours, I stay away from vivid colours and flashy patterns. And from short-lived fashion trends (...) everything with everything, that’s my principle. Fake jewellery decorates, it is no luxury indeed (...) I like good food, but I don’t go to extremes (...) Frankly, I am a real woman, I like to look pretty and neat – I think that’s the secret of being well-dressed. From the family budget I never spend one dime more than my share.”<sup>9</sup>  
(Mrs. Zoltán Kántor)

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<sup>6</sup> Lajos Parti Nagy, “Mattersburg leírása (diktátatok egy bédekkerhez)” [The Description of Mattersburg], *Lettre* 47 (Winter 2002), <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00012/00031/>, my translation

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.neprajz.hu/madok/otthonka.html>, my translation

<sup>8</sup> Fabricki Imre, “Olcsóbb-e a drága ruha?” [Are Expensive Clothes Cheaper?], *Figyelő*, 23 August 1961, my translation.

<sup>9</sup> *Nők Lapja* [Women’s Magazine] 25 January 1969, 18-19, my translation.

5.) newspaper article: “According to Norbert Wiener, an American mathematician, the people of the United States know how to work but don’t know what. Soviet people all know what to do but not all of them know how. In our work there are courageous explorers but also sluggish “riders”. We build outstanding reactive passenger planes but kitchen utensils less so, whereas everybody knows that it is more difficult to construct “TU”s than pans.”<sup>10</sup>

6.) archival document/report: “The production and use of synthetic fibres in recent years have grown rapidly all over the world. The fast development can be explained by the availability of chemical products which mostly serve as raw materials, the fact that fibres can be designed and the mechanical features of synthetic fibres are considerably better than those of natural fibres, their light weight, consequently the light weight of textiles produced from them, their easy handling, high aesthetic value and rapidly decreasing price.”<sup>11</sup>

7.) interview:

I.A.: Why do you wear the housedress? Do you like it?

J.: Yes, yes I do. It’s so very practical. Indeed, yes. It’s easy to wash, never gets wrinkled, there’s no need to iron it, it just dries quickly. And I love these two big pockets; there’s room for a tissue and also for the door keys. Yes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ilja Erenburg, “A fordulat kezdete” [The Beginning of the Turn], *Népszabadság*, 7 January 1959, 5, my translation.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs. József Nagy’s report to the Economic Committee, Subject: The Possibilities of Textile Industry for Using Synthetic Thread in Light of the Domestic Raw Material Supply and the International Division of Labour [A textilipar mesterséges szál felhasználás lehetőségei a hazai nyersanyagbázis és a nemzetközi munkamegosztás tükrében], 1 October 1968, Budapest, HNA (Hungarian National Archives), Mh-L 610/1968, 2, my translation.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with “Julianna”, 2 May 2005, Makó, Hungary.

### **Historical background**

The “Nylon War” (starting in the 1950s in the Soviet Union and in the 1960s in Hungary) was a term coined by an American journalist in the early 1950s to mean the ‘peaceful battle’ fought between the capitalist and the socialist camps along gendered lines of consumerism. (Read and discuss excerpt 5.) It was a peaceful rivalry that paralleled the more pronounced competition in military and heavy industries and the realm of hard sciences and space and information technology. The “Nylon War” enhanced the development of Light Industry and its change of profile to the production of synthetics and plastic materials. The objective was to produce consumer items in big quantities, products that were cheap, not so long-lasting, widely available for the masses, the treatment of which was easy as they were made of lesser-weight material produced by the chemical industry. The Hungarian light industry thus was to be reformed to fit these new aspirations: foreign trade, the textile industry and the chemical industry were jointly cooperating to establish Hungarian synthetics production and the manufacturing of synthetic goods. Cooperation among the countries of the bloc was also enhanced for a better supply of demands for synthetic threads and raw materials. Hungary had such a synthetic exchange agreement with Poland and Czechoslovakia. In this process the Soviet de-Stalinisation model was to be followed, which in the Soviet Union was initiated under the Khrushchev regime in the 1950s and in Hungary became the model to follow after the 1956 revolution under the Kádár regime. This tendency defined the direction the Hungarian light industry was to take up until the 1970s. In the official public discourse of the time this is framed as follows ‘in the scientific-technological revolution science has become a direct productive force’ (*Népszabadság*, “Creation and Socialism”). The ambition to enhance living standards became a way to enhance the formation of a very specific socialist-type consumer culture all across the Soviet-influenced Eastern bloc. In Hungary a large-scale state investment was launched called the “Polyester Program” by the Ministry of Light Industry as a part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Five-Year Plan, the launch of which was scheduled for 1967. It involved an overall reconstruction of four of the biggest textile factories so that their main profile would be the production of synthetic (and blend) threads. The pronounced aim was that by 1970 out of all materials/

ingredients produced and used by the light industry, 30% would be synthetic. Mrs. József Kovács, Minister of Light Industry, in an interview used interesting rhetoric when explaining the importance of this trend, emphasizing reasonable practicality, economic considerations (cheap, light weight products, satisfying growing demands) and the imperative to catch up with ‘the rest of the world’. (Read and discuss excerpt 6.)

To be sure, it was a large-scale development that had a huge impact on both sides of the “Wall” in the 1960s. A large number of plastic and synthetic goods and artifacts, mass produced with the new scientific technology, thus bore the mark of the new direction. Along the lines of this trend also, the new type of nylon housedress for the modern working woman and housewife was born, replacing the age-old symbol of domesticity, the apron. The first advertisement of ‘otthonka’ as something to wear at home by the modern housewife appeared in the September 1968 issue of *Women’s Magazine* (*Nők Lapja*), entitled ‘Homely Fashion’ (‘házas divat’) and at the Budapest Autumn Fair, that has just been reopened to the international public, “the Kőbánya synthetic” (“Kőbányai szintetikus”). Lining up clothes made of synthetics was the ‘hit’ of the year.

### **Gendered implications: Female role and uniformity**

Socialist consumerism, similar to its capitalist counterpart, was also primarily aimed at women by on the one hand motivating and on the other hand intricately regulating and curbing demand; as the economy was that of a planned economy, still struggling with pressing shortages, the enhancement of demand also had to be tailored to the plan. (See excerpt 4.) The housedress was specifically made for domestic use, despite its smashing popularity in factories as well. The emphasis thus was laid on the idea of separate spheres, in which the “otthonka” became an undeniable signifier of “the private” which was also a women’s realm. Thereby it testifies against the image of the socialist emancipated womanhood that only existed in party propaganda, and it tells the story of the double (triple) burden that women ‘enjoyed’. The housedress, which was introduced to replace the outdated apron as its modern nylon, colourful and improved version for the “modern woman”, unnoticeably became a part of women’s political disciplining, which made sure that the proper housewife knows her duty also *after* work when at home. (See and discuss excerpt 2.) It was a symbol of proper domesticity and thereby every woman’s proper socialist

morality, and their seeming equality. As women were regarded as less rational and therefore politically less reliable citizens the state hoped to win loyalty through the satisfaction of their demands. The party state thus hoped to acquire legitimacy and citizens' support based on gender-specific strategies.<sup>13</sup>

Although it highlighted the segregation of gendered spheres, at the same time the housedress effectively smoothed out and effaced differences of other nature, such as class, national or ethnic. No matter what it was that one was wearing underneath it, the gown effectively covered it up in the same vein as the school-gown of students. In the spirit of internationalism and egalitarianism it was available in most countries of the bloc, from the German Democratic Republic to Poland or Romania. The "better Western stuff", worn in the countries of the Western camp, sometimes arrived in Hungary by other than legal routes. Thus, the housedress embodied a sort of "aesthetics of sameness" and was worn as a "domestic nylon uniform" by women all over the bloc.

### **The housedress and nostalgia**

Why does one collect housedresses? Why does one write about them? Why does one still *wear* the housedress? (See and discuss excerpt 7.) The housedress has by now become a relic of the recent past that has earned its place in museums as well as being an important piece of our everyday history. It has also become emblematic of the four decades of socialism, as well as of female domesticity, asexuality and the proper performance of duties. However, women of the generation that came of age in the 1960s still wear it, often justifying this habit by emphasizing its 'practicality', the fact that 'it washes well', 'it dries quickly' and 'one doesn't even need to iron it', plus the pockets are very useful because one can keep things in them. Also, several literary and cultural sources refer to the housedress in one way or another, in which the housedress becomes associated with the "eternal feminine sacrifice" as well as with the "flawed socialist era". (See and discuss excerpt 1.) Focusing on these reminiscences, they themselves provide valuable insight into the connections between individual and collective memory. Objects that became popular in the period from the 1960s to the mid-1980s throughout the former bloc (in Hungary certainly), not only the housedress but also the "Sokol" radio or "Rocket" vacuum cleaner, all evoke some sort of private memory in people.

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<sup>13</sup> Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in The Soviet Union under Khrushchev." *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 211-252.



However, the mode/tone of that memory is varied and not without emotional charge; it can range from negative dismissal to overtly positive idolization. This emotive component is, however, highly intriguing for scholarly attention. Writing about a strange sense of “retro” nostalgia for everyday objects and items of clothing apparent in Eastern Europe from the 1990s on, Paul Betts claims that it is not only escapism from the disillusionment of the post-imperial (post-socialist) period, but also a “part of our historical consciousness (...) These objects are sites, surfaces which provide for the making of new memories and thereby play a significant role in the formation of new collective identities.”<sup>14</sup> Consumer goods thus play an important role in identity formation and therefore the memories of these artifacts are certainly indicative of the shapes of cultural identity of a community.

It is therefore crucial to look at the modes of memory and the factors that might have defined them. The socialist rhetoric on the duality of functionality and aesthetics becomes relevant at this point, as “rational aesthetics” and “rational taste” formed the cornerstones, the governing principles, of socialist morality and one of the important building blocks of the “socialist person”/ citizen. The reinforcement of the socialist conception of “taste” was crucial in view of its intricate connection to identity, and this was already known and taken advantage of in socialist consumerism from the 1960s on. The aims of the regime were obvious. If 1956 was not to be repeated, then the initially Soviet “puppet government” had to ensure its legitimacy at home as well as abroad. In order to gain the support of its citizens, a relative increase in living standards was to be accompanied with softer disciplining strategies directed towards citizens rather than outright threat and control. In such an environment, where citizens were slowly encouraged to consume and not only produce, the conceptualization of aesthetics and taste in connection with proper morality and the ideal socialist (gendered!) citizen was inevitable. From then on, the aesthetic and tasteful was also rational and reasonable (=reasonably priced), simple and useful. The ideal socialist consumer consumes in a way that enhances the growth of the community as well. (See excerpt 3.) The contemporary press drew a sharp line between socialist and capitalist aesthetic values, intertwining them with issues of morality. Aesthetics and utilitarianism together constituted a guiding principle for the increasingly popular applied and industrial arts.

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Betts, “The Twilight of Idols. East German Memory and Material Culture”, *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 3 (September 2002): 731-765.

(See and discuss excerpt 4.) Industrial artists were regarded as engineers of taste, the ones responsible for the enhancement of collective taste as well as the ones who created the visual language of economic prosperity and progress. As Betts also argues, socialist consumer goods (colourful, plastic everyday objects, designed machines) were the material expressions of the socialist present and its utopian vision of prosperity in the future.

When one remembers today and explains why one likes, collects, wears the housedress that is no longer in fashion (“because it is practical”, “reasonable” –see and discuss excerpt 7 again) and, what is more, is in sharp contrast to today’s fashion trends and the ideals of the health and beauty industry, all these discourses are present in reminiscences shaping, informing and justifying it. (See and discuss excerpt 3.) The individual in this way is in close interaction with the collective, the macro, and so the relational analysis of these two levels is of the utmost importance.

## Wrapping up

The issues that the micro case of the housedress raises, as we have seen above, are manifold. The “otthonka” has been and still is an important carrier of cultural meanings and it is also an indicator of some aspects of Hungarian social relations, including gender relations and gendered spheres. Furthermore, it allows us to gain insight into more subtle mechanisms of (soviet-type) imperial ideology by looking at how it reached into the sphere of the private. By the blurring of the public/private divide it thus disturbs theories that aim at maintaining a strict state versus family dualism and argue for the ‘private sphere as the sole sphere of resistance’.<sup>15</sup> In this way the analysis of correlations among gendered consumerism, aesthetics, fashion and the wider context of power mechanisms as well as the social (including gender) relations, adds to our understanding of Soviet-type imperialism. Moreover, it allows us to place these imperial power structures in the broader global context of the Cold War, thereby shedding light on the important processes of “the worlding” of Central and Eastern Europe as I have urged above following Spivak.

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<sup>15</sup> This has crystallized around the gender and citizenship debate regarding differences between the “Western-type individual-based” citizenship and the “East-European type socialist citizenship”. See, for example, Gail Klingman, *Romania After Ceausescu: Post-communist Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Katherine Verdery, *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Eva Fodor, *Working Difference. Women’s Working Lives in Hungary and Austria 1945-1995* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003); and Gillian Pascal and Anna Kwak, *Gender Regimes in Transition in Central and Eastern Europe* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2005).

In the context of the ‘historical present’ this exercise enhances our understanding of the workings of cultural/collective memory and power relations, which we could also term the *colonization of the private*.<sup>16</sup> These everyday objects, items of clothing, products of the ready-made industry, found their way into the sphere of the home, the private. In consequence, their memory became organic parts of people’s psyches and mindsets. Therefore this legacy still lingers on, sometimes in varied forms, but sometimes in highly schematic forms. Still, the memory of these items is never independent but indicative of how the whole culture positions itself to its own recent past. Lastly, it brings us closer to approaching contemporary links among issues of globalization, consumption and citizenship. When a new generation of ‘housewives’ do not wear a ‘housedress’ but go to the “Chinese store” for cheap, lower-quality and mass-produced clothes, when the garment industry is one of the largest colonizing enterprises exploiting millions, and when even the most ordinary person may look like a celebrity by wearing fake *haute couture*, the question of aesthetics and taste and the tension between the phenomenon of uniformity and the “individualist” rhetoric of today becomes relevant. The neo-colonial context reconfigures consumption patterns, and therefore “the aesthetics of sameness”, though with a slight shift in meaning, gains even greater importance. This consequently creates different forms of transnational connections and identifications in subjects.

### Concepts to bear in mind

- The colonizing of imagination and the private sphere (blurring the private and the public)
- Nostalgia and the commodification of nostalgia
- Socialist consumerism
- The socialist progress narrative as another stream of the teleological project of modernity
- Taste – aesthetics – rationality-practicality-morality and the socialist citizen
- The disciplining socialist state instead of the controlling one
- The workings of socialist power relations along gendered lines
- The aesthetics of sameness (power relations along the lines of ethnicity and nationality)

<sup>16</sup> See ‘colonization of imagination’ in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). The expression ‘colonization of memory’ could be also mentioned as a useful concept to understand the phenomenon. It derives from Sabrina Marchetti, Utrecht University.

**Assignment**

Think of any particular everyday object that was/is widespread in your country and try to analyse its cultural meanings.

Connect the study of the Cold War and within that Soviet-type imperialism in the twentieth century to possible ways of studying “the worlding” of the so-called ‘Second World’ and ‘Eastern Europe’.

Think of further connections that could be established between gender, consumerism and power.

What other possible shapes has imperialism taken in history and, more importantly, how does the issue relate to cultural memory and historiography?

Think about cultural memory in the “West” and compare. Is there a sense of nostalgia for the 1960s-1970s in the West? Is it similar to that found in Eastern European countries? Is it different? In what ways is it different?

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## Looking at the East. The Representation of the Female Body in Italian Orientalist Painting

*Francesca Setzu*



Figure 4: Ethiopia, 1936.

Family collection, Francesca Setzu

In this paper I examine some key concepts of the representation of the female body in Italian orientalist painting. We can use these concepts as a starting point to discuss in the classroom the roles that imperialism and colonialism play in orientalist painting and, where possible, to capture the complexity of Eastern women's condition within a painting. We can suggest that students compare these images of women with images in other imperialist contexts (for example, British and French contexts) and explore what makes these representations so popular and how these paintings influenced images of Eastern women in literature, film and advertising.

Images of Eastern women found in European orientalist painting were overtly fetishized but retained an incontrovertible dimension of sumptuous fascination that defies a reductive explanation based on class and gender stereotyping. There is a need to understand the factors involved in the

construction of such images, where the female body has been constructed as an object of male erotic gaze.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the centuries, Italian culture has always had periods marked by special interest in the world of the East, especially the Islamic Arab world. Rich and diverse cultural relations have existed between Italy and the Oriental world ever since the Roman Empire. This is demonstrated in archeological findings as well as by the commercial ties which existed for a number of centuries between areas in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, including the intercultural relations that existed between the Italian Maritime republics (Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, and Venice) and the Arab World.<sup>2</sup>

Later, from the end of the eighteenth century, it was chiefly British and French artists and travellers, for the most part attached to military and diplomatic missions, who set out explicitly and systematically to explore the East. The term Orient became usually synonymous with the “Middle East”; it was conventionally applied to the Islamic countries in Africa and Asia. In the field of art, “Orientalism” denotes and describes the European iconography connected with those countries. Western artists developed a curiosity about these distant lands, and a specific interest in exotic elements arose, influencing and permeating European tastes in literature, music and the visual arts.<sup>3</sup>

Following the Grand Tour undertaken mainly by upper-class European young men, Italian Orientalist artists explored this area in order to make commissioned paintings. They went from Morocco to as far as Persia, specializing in vast panoramic views or recording characteristic sites and depicting people and oriental daily life. This exploration was often conducted with a passion for detail rather than out of curiosity about local customs: some artists merely travelled in the Arab world, while other artists settled, sometimes for long periods, in Muslim capitals, becoming familiar with the environment and culture of the Otherness. Italy is rich in different schools and traditions, and each made its own contribution, even within specific genres.<sup>4</sup>

Viewed through Western eyes, the Orient evoked by Italian artists was generally a world struck by the delicacy of the Eastern light.

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<sup>1</sup> Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalism Painting* (Paris: ACR, 1996), 4-19

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Juler, *Les Orientalistes de l'école Italienne* (Paris: ACR, 1994), 6-20

<sup>3</sup> Kristian Davies, *Orientalists: Western Artists in Arabia, the Sahara, Persia* (New York: Laynfaroh, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Caroline Juler, *Les Orientalistes de l'école Italienne* (Paris: ACR, 1994), 6-20; Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalism Painting* (Paris: ACR, 1996), 4-19.

Orientalist painting focuses on the range of pictorial options open to Italian artists within such major themes as portraits, religious and women subjects, and landscape. Italian artists came to the Middle East from a culture steeped in technical and compositional traditions. Despite the apparent difference of the people and places that they encountered in the Orient, one of the most popular of all themes in Orientalist painting was the Eastern woman in her quarters.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth century, Eastern female figures were frequently represented as exotic and veiled women, who we can see behind the veil as a figure of sexual secrecy and inaccessibility. The inaccessibility of the Eastern woman was a mirror of the mystery of the Orient itself; this process of exposing the female Other, of literally denuding her, came to allegorize the western masculinist power of possession. In the period 1880-1920, the politics and aesthetics of nakedness were the result of ambivalent nineteenth-century attitudes toward the clothed and unclothed body. The orientalist painters gave a full view to their imagination and their manner of treating the oriental subjects.<sup>6</sup> The topic of nudity cannot be fully comprehended without reference to the experience of empire. Colonialism's seemingly timeless fascination with indigenous undressed and veiled women provoked a number of questions about human difference, evolution and the nature of civilization. The topos of the harem in contemporary popular culture draws, of course, on the history of Orientalist fantasies. The harem is probably the best-known and most famous of all Eastern institutions, but its full significance is still often misunderstood. Western painting delineates life in the harems with great assurance and apparent exactitude, rather like European Orientalist studio paintings. For example, "Turkish Bath" (1862) was painted without the artist Ingres ever visiting the Orient; it was created in studios based on secondary accounts. The excursions to the Orient, and on-location paintings by painters, served largely to authenticate an *a priori vision*. Italian artists were giving their best in creativity and inventiveness where they replicated the colours found in the East: A. Perelli, Zampighi and Giuseppe Riva showed the common description of harem life

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4-19

<sup>6</sup> See Benjamin Constant, "Une terrasse au Maroc, le soir" (1879) Musée des Beaux Arts, Montréal, Canada or Jean-Léon Gérôme, "Allumeuse de narghilé", Gallery Keops, Genève, Switzerland. Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalism Painting* (Paris: ACR, 1996), 4-19; Fatima Mernissi, *Sherazade Goes West* (Washington: Pocket, 2001).



as a scene of oriental domesticity: Junoesque women affected by indolence lying on oriental sofas with animals.<sup>7</sup>

Filippo Bartolini (1861-1908), who travelled in Algeria, as did several lesser known Italian painters of the late nineteenth century, represented seductive, diaphanously young women hedonistically luxuriating in Mediterranean sites suggestive of the harem. Paintings such as this touch the exotic and theatrical nature of Italian taste and their significance is one of exotic sexuality. The female figures of Filippo Baratti (1868-1901) are young and uncorseted; he described scenes of conviviality, feminine complicity and daily occupations carried out by eunuchs or female servants in gardens, terraces and patios.<sup>8</sup> Fabio Fabbi travelled widely in the Muslim world and developed a particular affection for Egypt.<sup>9</sup> The work of both Filippo Baratti and Fabio Fabbi was a part of cultural discourse centred on femininity and sexuality. It is an exploration of this discourse that offers a further understanding of the significance of the imagery concerned. This hedonism, in which sexual license played a part, was a key theme in art at the end of the nineteenth century. In their works, the technical skill and the sense of colour harmony were reminiscent of scenarios in painting offered by French painters. From the 1840s, Italian painting was increasingly influenced by French Orientalism; the fact that such material was placed in the “other” world of the East allowed these paintings to be consumed without their content seeming to compromise the status of proper young women in late nineteenth-century Italy.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the Oriental and Eastern world generated models symbolic of its own physiognomy: it offered itself as a fable and an enchantment, determining a subliminal erotic fascination.<sup>11</sup>

In the Orient generally, Italian artists were numerous, and they undertook numerous trips to various countries. In many cases they become quite familiar with the environment and with local customs, but they remained European in spirit and style. The combination of escapism and romance was a common theme in this period, often underpinned by complex imperialist strategies of sexual displacement. The positioning of the openly sexual in sites

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<sup>7</sup> Caroline Juler, *Les Orientalistes de l'école Italienne* (Paris: ACR, 1994), 6-20

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>10</sup> Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalism Painting* (Paris: ACR, 1996), 4-19

<sup>11</sup> Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalism Painting* (Paris: ACR, 1996), 4-19

in which women connoted “Otherness” allowed the voyeuristic Italian the freedom of the gaze, disassociated from any connection with young women of the same race and class.<sup>12</sup>

The global debate over Western representations of the Middle East initiated by Edward Said’s work *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*,<sup>13</sup> reminds us that the study of Orientalism was not dominated by a single theory. Oriental painting is never the direct expression of a single context, and colonialism cannot be reduced to simply a relationship of domination by the occupier and to a universally uniform phenomenon. So we cannot consider oriental painting to be simply *a sequence of fictions serving the West’s desire for superiority and control over the East*. We could examine orientalist paintings in their political and cultural context, in light of the geopolitical and anthropological conditions in which artists worked and conditioned Europe’s knowledge of the Orient.<sup>14</sup>

### Assignments

Select a painting referred to in the text or another painting of Orientalist subject matter. See, for instance, the list of museums and websites listed below.

- What do the paintings tell us about the artist? Where did the artist produce the painting? How did they get their information about the women?
- Select artists from different imperial and national contexts. What thematic similarities or differences are evident?
- Find orientalist paintings by women artists. Who is the artist and where did she produce the painting?
- How does the gender of the artist influence the depiction of Eastern women? Is it possible to establish this? Give evidence for your argument.
- How are women represented in art and imagery by artists of their area or country? How does this diverge or converge with the approach of European artists?
- How has such artistic representations influenced knowledge more generally about women? What alternative representations of Eastern women are available?

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<sup>12</sup> Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalism Painting* (Paris: ACR, 1996), 114-130

<sup>13</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Vintage, 1979)

<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Tromans, *The Lure of the East. British Orientalist Painting* (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 2008).

## Museums

The British Museum, London, UK, [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

The Wallace Collection, London, UK [www.wallacecollection.org](http://www.wallacecollection.org)

Musée du Quai, Branly, Paris, France, [www.quaibranly.fr](http://www.quaibranly.fr)

Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France, [www.musee-orsay.fr](http://www.musee-orsay.fr)

Musée du Louvre, Paris, France, [www.louvre.fr](http://www.louvre.fr)

Musée des Années 30, Boulogne-Billancourt, France <http://www.annees30.com/>

Museo Revoltella, Trieste, Italy, <http://www.museorevoltella.it/museo.php>

Galleria d'Arte Narciso, Turin, Italy, <http://www.gallerianarciso.it/>

Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey [http://www.pm.org.tr/index\\_en.html](http://www.pm.org.tr/index_en.html)

## Websites

<http://www.orientalist-art.org.uk/>

<http://www.harem.org.uk/>

<http://www.orientalistart.net/index.html>

<http://www.arabartgallery.com/orient1.htm>

<http://orientaliste.free.fr/>

<http://www.productionmyarts.com/arts-en-profondeur/peintres-orientalistes/sommaire-orientalistes-fr.htm>

<http://www.copia-di-arte.com/a/pittura-orientalista.html>

<http://www.artesuarte.it/articolo.php?id=33>

## Teaching National Socialist History by Reading Diaries of the Second World War

*Sabine Grenz*



Figure 5: 'Autobiographical material' Photograph by Sabine Grenz

The history of the Nazi empire and its horrible outcomes are very well known. As a result, as a university teacher – especially in Germany but also in other European countries – one can assume that students already have a substantial knowledge about this period of time. Furthermore, for students in history National Socialism (NS) is part of their regular studies. As a result, in Gender Studies one might have a class with very different stages of knowledge. Sometimes, this knowledge is phrased in discursive routines concerning how to negotiate this past. Such negotiation differs according to one's individual political attitude, in relation to one's family memory and from country to country. As a consequence, the issue is less to teach the empire as such but rather to make nuances visible and show the relationship between the past and its cultural memory.

Materials such as oral history interviews, autobiographical reports, letters and diaries show that history is not monolithic nor is it only made by rulers and politicians. Thus, they can be used as small case studies showing

different attitudes within one population. They exemplify how women and men of different social groups thematized current issues in an individual and/or collectively shaped way. Furthermore, autobiographical materials open up space for recognizing the complexity and nuances in people's daily life. Furthermore, self-narratives give the impression of authenticity and immediacy. Even though immediacy will be problematized in the course of the learning process, it is useful because it creates puzzles about the relationship between 'us' and 'them' and, thus, is productive for teaching the workings of dictatorships. In relation to politicised periods such as National Socialism and the Second World War, self-narratives can be particularly useful for a discussion on relationships between factual history, objective events, political systems and personal perspectives. Depending on people's position and interests their narratives will be more or less related to political decisions and following events.

In this article I will suggest how teaching National Socialism with self-narratives such as diaries written at the end of the Second World War might be possible. The course I will outline has not been taught yet but is currently in preparation as outcome of an ongoing research project on unpublished diaries written in Germany at that time.<sup>1</sup> The course can be taught on both levels, BA and MA. Teaching with such materials will support the development of research abilities and show students how to work through complex issues shaped by a multitude of perspectives (especially in an international context). Moreover, the student discussions, their potential essays and thesis might also provide insights for the researcher.

The multitude of perspectives did not only exist in the past but is present in the manifold memories as well as public discussions in Germany. It is enhanced in international contexts, in which students learn about other national histories. As a result, they can restructure their existing knowledge, which they gained in their own national context. For this reason, it will be even more appealing to teach such a course with international students.

The suggested course has three different strands interwoven with each other. Nevertheless, in this article I will briefly sketch them separately one after the other. Strand A is the starting point and the heart of the course that broadly follows the approach of problem based learning. The seminar will be 'practical'. It will provide diary material for small case studies and discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sabine Grenz, "German Women Writing about the End of the Second World War – A Feminist Analysis", *G/SS*, 2007 [www.gjss.org/images/stories/volumes/4/2/grenz.pdf](http://www.gjss.org/images/stories/volumes/4/2/grenz.pdf) (seen on 4 September 2009).

As a result, this strand also entails the epistemological and methodological challenges of the material. Strand B and C will provide the background knowledge about this period of time: the wider context of National Socialism research and the gender dimensions of the historical period. Following the course students potentially write essays and are hopefully encouraged to choose this material for their final thesis.

### ***Strand A: Reading diaries***

There are a few examples such as Margarethe Dörr who conducted interviews with 300 women about the end of the Second World War and read diaries of many of them<sup>2</sup> as well as Susanne zur Nieden's study focussing on women's diaries 1943-1945<sup>3</sup> that can be used as introductory material. Both mainly analyse texts written by so-called Aryan women at the end of the Second World War. In terms of other social groups (regardless of whether they were victimised or perpetrators) there are only few interpretations and methodological reflections,<sup>4</sup> even though there are many editions.<sup>5</sup> These works can be used for an initial discussion on how diaries can be interpreted.

Published diaries can be used as study material as well. However, the course will possibly include a visit to an archive of personal documents. With such a visit, learning will be (partly) based on experience because students have to enter the archival space and search for – mostly – handwritten material. Thus, students will experience the difficulties of reading other people's handwritings and reading handwritings from other periods of time. Seeing, feeling and reading such material is in itself a learning experience, since the historicity of the material and its foreignness become visible.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, diaries do not only contain texts but also pictures, newspaper articles, notes on added sheets

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Margarete Dörr, „Wer die Zeit nicht miterlebt hat ...“ *Frauenerfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg und in den Jahren danach*. Vol. I *Lebensgeschichten*, Vol. II. *Kriegsalltag*, Vol. III. *Das Verhältnis zum Nationalsozialismus und zum Krieg* (Frankfurt/M: Cmpus, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Susanne zur Nieden, *Alltag im Ausnahmezustand. Frauentagebücher im zerstörten Deutschland 1943-1945* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1993), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Alexandra Garbarini, *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006); Rachel Feldhay Brenner, “Voices from Destruction: Two Eyewitness Testimonies from the Stanislaw Ghetto”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 22 no. 2 (2008): 320-339.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Monika Richarz, (ed.), *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland. Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1918-1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1982); David Patterson, “Through the Eyes of Those Who Were There”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 18 no. 2 (2004): 274-290.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993), 32.

and the like. Some students might even have diaries from relatives and might feel sufficiently free to show the material to other students.

For the teaching process, it will be important to give space for student's experiences. Some might have dealt with such materials in other contexts. What did they find interesting about it? What problems did they encounter? What did they find out? And what did they enjoy while working with them?

However, it will also be necessary to discuss the different layers of epistemic challenges that diaries carry with them. To begin with, diaries were written relatively short after the described experience. They are incoherent and fragmentary.<sup>7</sup> Discontinuity is a characteristic.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to interviews conducted ten or more years after the events or subsequently published autobiographies in which experiences can be summarized and presented as coherent, diaries include few summaries or overviews. Diarists did not have the knowledge, the relief or increased burden that characterize interviews conducted years after the war.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary they point to an open future.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, diaries convey the impression of immediacy. However, the autobiographic text is not necessarily identical with factual truth.<sup>11</sup> Some use their diary for self-assertion, others censor themselves. Consequently, many diaries are written at least for an imaginary reader. These issues contradict the impression of immediacy. They show that the relationship between the text and its writer is complicated.

In order to start the analytical process, it can be useful to investigate the structure of a diary passage in more detail. For instance, did the person write as a daily discipline or only, when something important had happened?<sup>12</sup> Can the intention of the writer be recognised? Did s/he, for instance, write to express her/himself or to remember something?<sup>13</sup> Does the text disclose anything about the writing circumstances?

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow, *Europäische Tagebücher. Eigenart, Formen, Entwicklung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Philippe Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?", *Biography* 24 no. 1 (2001): 99-112, 105.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lutz Niethammer, (ed.), *„Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll.“ Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet. Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960*, Bd. I. (Berlin: J. H. W. Dietz Nachf, 1983.), 163-232; Dörr, *„Wer die Zeit nicht miterlebt hat ...“*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?", 103; Dusini, *Das Tagebuch. Möglichkeiten einer Gattung* (München: Fink, 2005), 73 and 76. Dusini emphasizes the backward perspective of diary narration and calls it "remembering close-up".

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gabriele Jancke and Claudia Ulbrich (ed.), *Vom Individuum zur Person. Neue Konzepte im Spannungsfeld von Autobiographietheorie und Selbstzeugnisforschung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005): 12; Wuthenow, Ralph-Rainer, *Europäische Tagebücher*, 4. However, this does not mean that they do not entail any truths. Individual expressions can be objectively true cf. Edward Kanterian, "Über den unterschiedlichen Wahrheitsgehalt von Holocaust-Tagebüchern", *Sinn und Form. Beiträge zur Literatur*, 60 no. 3 (2008): 343-352.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?", 105.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lejeune, "How Do Diaries End?", 106f.

Subsequently, to deepen the analysis some background knowledge has to be researched by students and provided by the teacher. Since it is still unknown, which diary passages will be found in the archive or brought by a student, it is impossible to say beforehand exactly what this background knowledge will include. However, in my description of strand B and C I will expand a bit on possible examples.

For this analytical section a discourse analytic methodology will be introduced. Drawing on the knowledge strand B and C as well as other historical knowledge of gender relations students will investigate the discourses diarists make use of and discuss them with each other. This will enable students to recognise similarities and differences in the reservoir the diarists draw on but also their particular perspective on this discursive reservoir.

### ***Strand B and C: National Socialism and its gender dimensions***

The general knowledge of NS and the Second World War can be freshened up by watching documentaries and by visiting memorial sites. However, more specific and more exact knowledge provided by the academic body of literature will be needed as well, depending on the topics that arise from the material.

It is not unlikely that the following issue will arise: How much did people who were not actively involved know about the Holocaust and/or to what extent did they agree with anti-Jewish policies and the different genocides? This is still a burning research question and as a consequence, it is vividly discussed.<sup>14</sup> Peter Longerich, for instance, in his study, mostly based on official resources and the documents created by the Social Democrats in exile – but also on published diaries – concludes that the annihilation of Jews was an open secret from 1942 onwards.<sup>15</sup>

Margarete Dörr who intended to give insight in the overall life of young women and their daily problems during the war comes to a different conclusion. For her it seems impossible to find out how much the women knew about the genocide.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Hans Mommsen, "Hannah Arendt und der Prozeß gegen Adolf Eichmann", Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen* (München: Piper, 2006), 15 [*Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*]; Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge/Mass: Belknap Press, 2008); Götz Aly (ed.), *Volkes Stimme. Skepsis und Führervertrauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2006), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Peter Longerich, „Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!“ *Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (München: Siedler, 2006), 325f.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Dörr, „Wer die Zeit nicht miterlebt hat ...“ Vol. III, 252-284.



Always associated with this issue is the concern that the community of all “Aryan” Germans agreeing on anti-Semitic Nazi politics actually existed. In this context, the work of Zygmunt Bauman pointing to the impersonality, complexity and abstractness of modern administration provides impulses for a discussion.<sup>17</sup> A distinctive aspect for Bauman is that the Holocaust was not an emotionalised pogrom but a composition of many administrative activities executed with a cool mind or against one’s own will (for which Hannah Arendt’s book about Eichmann and the *Banality of Evil* will provide a very good example).<sup>18</sup> For this reason, Bauman interprets the Holocaust as something that can happen again in other contexts.<sup>19</sup>

Related questions that might arise in student discussions (or can be brought up by the teacher) could be: How can these different results be explained? What does “knowledge” in this context mean? How can we explain that for some persons the knowledge of individual incidents and “knowledge” through rumours led to understanding, while others claimed they did not have any clue?<sup>20</sup> Was it related to their overall political awareness or to the circumstances they lived in? Was this knowledge gendered? How can the diary texts provided in the course be related to the puzzle of “knowledge”? Can other aspects be found?

Furthermore, how individuals in their diary writing related to ideologies such as the myth of the “new man” and the “new healthy and pure body of the nation” was not only shaped by their individual attitudes and development but also by their social position. Besides the separation of different persons according to “race”, people were also segregated according to gender.<sup>21</sup> As a result, for a discussion of personal documents such as diaries it is also important to deepen the knowledge about gender relations in this period of time.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Dialektik der Ordnung. Die Moderne und der Holocaust* [Modernity and the Holocaust] (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2002) 166ff.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 35f. Bauman’s work can be complemented by Christopher Browning’s study of one police battalion in which he reconstructed how “normal men” became murderers by analysing their self-narratives collected as court records. Christopher R. Browning, *Ganz normale Männer. Das Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101 und die „Endlösung“ in Polen* [Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland] (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2007), 86f.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Bauman, *Dialektik der Moderne (Modernity and the Holocaust)*, 166ff.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Michael Wildt, review about: Dörner, Bernward: *Die Deutschen und der Holocaust. Was niemand wissen wollte, aber jeder wissen konnte*. Berlin 2007. *H-Soz-u-Kult* <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/seen/4/September/2009>, 12.03.2008.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Dagmar Reese (ed.), *Die BDM-Generation. Weibliche Jugendliche in Deutschland und Österreich im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2007), 10.

One issue that needs to be discussed within the course is the contradictory gender ideology. For instance, the conservative imagination of women that they are first and foremost mothers was enhanced by NS ideology,<sup>22</sup> however, simultaneously NS was a period of modernisation for women. Even though (racially privileged) women were marginalised through ideology, in practice they were not necessarily restricted to their homes. For instance, some were offered a career in the Reich Labour Service (RAD). Women also became perpetrators, for example, as guards in concentration camps or to a different degree in the “struggle” for German identity in the occupied areas.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, one can see that racially privileged women enjoyed new liberties and career options,<sup>24</sup> whereas women labelled as Jewish were excluded from this modernisation and were doubly excluded.<sup>25</sup> Another topic for the discussion is sexuality. In contrast to the assumption that sexuality in general was suppressed, Dagmar Herzog states that “Aryan” heterosexual relationships were enhanced,<sup>26</sup> whereas sexuality for people labelled as racially or otherwise degenerated was restricted. Similarly, homosexuality and visible prostitution (street prostitution) were prohibited.<sup>27</sup> Other topics might be the relationship between the front and the home-front<sup>28</sup> or the construction of masculinities.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ralph M. Leck, “Conservative Empowerment and the Gender of Nazism: Paradigms of Power and Complicity in German Women’s History”, *Journal of Women’s History* 12 no. 2 (2002): 147-200 and Christina Herkommer, *Frauen im Nationalsozialismus – Opfer oder Täterinnen? Eine Kontroverse der Frauenforschung im Spiegel feministischer Theoriebildung und der allgemeinen historischen Aufarbeitung der NS-Vergangenheit* (München: Meidenbauer, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Simone Erpel (ed.), *Im Gefolge der SS: Aufseherinnen des KZ Ravensbrück* (Berlin: Metropol, 2007); Elizabeth Harvey, “Deutsche Frauen und der ‘Volkstumskampf’ im besetzten Polen”, in *Heimat-Front. Militär und Geschlechterverhältnisse im Zeitalter der Weltkriege*, ed. Karin Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Dagmar Reese, ed., *Die BDM-Generation*; Michelle Mouton, “Sports, Song and Socialisation. Women’s Memories of Youthful Activity and Political Indoctrination in the BDM”, *Journal of Women’s History* 17, no. 2 (2005): 62-86.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gisela Bock, “Einführung”, in *Genozid und Geschlecht. Jüdische Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Lagersystem*, ed. Gisela Bock (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism. Memory and Morality in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Günter Grau, ed., *Homosexualität in der NS-Zeit. Dokumente einer Diskriminierung und Verfolgung* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1993); Birte Kundrus, “Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, 1939 to 1945” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1&2 (2002): 201-222; and Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policy”, *Journal for the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1&2 (2002): 67-94.

<sup>28</sup> For example, *Heimat-Front*, ed. Karin Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999); Insa Meinen, *Wehrmacht und Prostitution im besetzten Frankreich* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 2002); Paula Diehl, *Macht, Mythos, Utopie. Die Körperbilder der SS-Männer* (Berlin: Akademie, 2005); Frank Werner, “‘Hart müssen wir hier draußen sein’. Soldatische Männlichkeit im Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1944”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 34 (2008): 5-40.

These issues together with the empirical material will most likely evoke group discussions. These should not be suppressed but rather enhanced in order to support student's interests and, as a result, have good learning results. The insight into the complexity of gender relations within Germany needs to be discussed with European students on a European level. One starting question could be: How were gender relations constructed in other regions/countries? It would be advantageous if (also on the international level) archival and personal materials were available for analysis and as a basis of the discussion.

### ***Final Remarks***

Teaching this contested area with many traps, one has to consider that understanding itself is embedded in history.<sup>30</sup> It changes for individuals as their knowledge increases and it changes from one generation to the other. For instance, Margarete Dörr was 17 years old when the war ended. Consequently, her interviewees – German women who experienced the Second World War and were alive in the 1990s – are her peers. She speaks about the women and paraphrases their interview and diary texts with great empathy. To give another example, Susanne zur Nieden is the children's generation. She was confronted with the silence of her parents' generation and developed a desire to find out "the truth" about National Socialism. As a result, students – again another generation – will most likely have different interests and potentially can teach the teacher.

Germans with German relatives commonly have conscious family relationships to the "Third Reich" and know personal stories from that period. This will influence the learning process. As research suggests, the younger generation is in danger of heroizing their grandparents.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, there is an ever-increasing distance from one generation to the other, which will bring forth a changing attitude towards this history. This is not only true for Germans but for most Europeans with European relatives, since family memories of this period of time are vivid in all European areas. The challenge of teaching a European group is to initiate (or: not to suppress) the desire to uncover and to discuss these different cultural and family memories. What relationship did their family, region or country have to Germany? How was

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960), 250.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Harald Welzer, *Opa war kein Nazi* (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 2002).

National Socialism discussed during that period, for instance, in newspapers or other archival sources? Who collaborated? Who was victimised? How were they treated afterwards? What research do they know from their country?

On the whole, this course should enable and encourage students to write an essay or even their final thesis on this subject. One part of the supervision could be a collective process, in which meetings and discussions of the group will be initiated. This would be especially intriguing on an international basis with students not only representing different national backgrounds but also working with different languages.

Note:

For online resources on the Holocaust, check these websites:

<http://www.ushmm.org/education/> (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) – with special information for teachers (in particular school teachers)

<http://college.usc.edu/vhi/> (USC Shoah Foundation Institute) – among other materials, you can access video clips of the visual history archive

[http://www1.yadvashem.org/education/index\\_education.html](http://www1.yadvashem.org/education/index_education.html) (Yad Vashem, Israel) includes information in several European languages

Of further possible interest:

<http://www.holocaust-mahnmal.de/en/> (The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin)

<http://www.juedisches-museum-berlin.de/site/EN/homepage.php?meta=TRUE> (Jewish Museum, Berlin)

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## The Traumatic Impact of the Penal Frameworks of the Soviet Regime: Pathways of Female Remembering<sup>1</sup>

*Leena Kurvet-Käosaar*



Figure 6: Photograph by Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, inset drawing by Evi Tallo, an Estonian woman deported in 1941 and again in 1950.

The impact of political regimes of a totalitarian nature does not pass with their coming to an end but forms complicated grids of memory, often attended by specific and limited perspectives, under the new socio-political and ideological frameworks. One of the common limitations of the construction of memory frames in formerly occupied/colonized countries is the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of women's experience. Viewing the Soviet regime as colonial in nature, including its means of securing the domination of the regime via extensive penal frameworks, I wish to highlight Baltic women's modes of remembering of the repressions of the regime, focusing in particular on the possibilities of representing the traumatic quality of that experience. My discussion relates to the key concepts of the book, those of gender and empire by, on the one hand, elaborating why women's (full) experience of colonialism

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Estonian Science Foundation for the ETF grant "Positioning Life-Writing on Estonian Literary Landscapes", which has supported my research.



can remain unmediated and how, in turn, such a process significantly alters and impoverishes the overall perception and conceptualization of a totalitarian colonizing regime. Further, I outline some possibilities of filling the gender gaps in such conceptualization processes with the help of flexible and nuanced interpretation strategies that contribute to making the pathways of female remembering visible alongside those of men.

### *Penal frameworks of a colonial regime*

In the wider postcolonial critical framework, the Soviet regime has been regarded as colonial in terms of its rationale, ideological rhetoric and operational practices.<sup>2</sup> As Violeta Kelertas, a Lithuanian cultural critic and the editor of a recent collection of articles titled *Baltic Postcolonialism*, points out, “Russia never acknowledged its goal of communist world domination. Instead, when speaking of foreign diplomacy it employed rhetorical terms to speak of the ‘brotherhood of nations’.”<sup>3</sup> The trope of the friendship of nations was also employed within the Soviet Union as part of the rhetoric of ideology; the regime, however, was secured via different means, among which an intricate penal system conceived and put into practice by the Soviet authorities played an important role. The purpose of a system that included a wide array of tools of repression, such as extensive surveillance mechanisms, social stigmatisation and labelling, arrests, labour camps, deportations, and executions, was to guarantee the subjugation of the occupied nations to the Soviet regime, to make them part of the Soviet Empire. The penal system, including an extensive prison camp and relocation framework sometimes also referred to as the Gulag, was used throughout the Soviet Union to ensure the domination of the regime. With seven million prisoners in the period 1934-41 alone,<sup>4</sup> the Gulag system has sometimes metaphorically been viewed as “a microcosm of life in the Soviet Union”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See David Chioni Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique”, *PMLA* 116 (January 2001): 111-12; Violeta Kelertas, “Introduction: Baltic Postcolonialism and its Critiques”, in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. Violeta Kelertas (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2006), 1-10.

<sup>3</sup> Kelertas, “Introduction”, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jura Avizienis, “Learning to Curse in Russian: Mimicry in Siberian Exile notes”, in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, 188.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

### *Baltic narratives of the repressions of the regime*

Reflections on surviving the various repressions of the Soviet regime (including the Gulag) form the core of thousands of personal narratives of the Baltic peoples, most of which were written or recorded during and after the period of regaining independence. Although the number of women's narratives is very high,<sup>6</sup> the possibilities of articulation of the female experience of the regime and its repressions have to be carefully weighed in relation to the normative testimonial and commemorative framework within which the narratives have emerged. Such a framework capitalizes on individuals' successful survival of the harsh and inhuman means of the repressions of the regime, highlighting that the objective of this penal framework of the Soviet regime – to extinguish national identity and culture and a belief in democratic values – was not realized. Presenting the experience as traumatic and as having a long-lasting hurtful effect would mean at least partially acknowledging that the regime did succeed, that the penal measures left damaging traces. Especially for women, in asserting such an impact, there is much at stake. As both making history and writing history have traditionally been male activities in which women have had little or no part, the overt problematization of accepted historical paradigms entails risking one's foothold in the historical discourse both as an individual and as a group. Depending on the exact nature of why a given repression experience is perceived as traumatic and particularly in cases where taboo subjects such as sexual violence against women are involved, mediating the experience can also result in social stigmatisation.

In the light of women's position in relation to the canon of memory and history, it is noteworthy that the issue of the traumatic nature of the repression experience has been raised in the Baltics by women, for example, in the 1995 award-winning novel *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*<sup>7</sup> by Latvian American author Agate Nesaule and ten years later by Estonian

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<sup>6</sup> The number of narratives by women in particular in the genre of the deportation story is high for various reasons. First, the phenomenon referred to as deportation includes roughly two types of repositioning of large numbers of Baltic peoples: labour camps and resettlement to thinly populated (partially inhabitable) areas of the Soviet Union. Women and children were mainly subjected to the latter type of penal relocation, where living conditions, although varying in harshness, made survival more likely than in labour camps. Second, deportation was an event (contrary to, for example, the experience of forced military engagement) that centrally involved women, in latter processes of the re-evaluation of history becoming a topic area to which women could significantly contribute. It was importantly within the framework of the deportation narrative that everyday experience relating to the repressive nature of the Soviet regime emerged as a relevant aspect of collective memory and national history-building processes. This makes the deportation narrative an important site for voicing the female experience of the repressions of the regime.

<sup>7</sup> New York: Penguin, 1995.

journalist Imbi Paju in her documentary *Memories Denied* (2005) and in a book bearing a similar title. Both authors relate the traumatic quality of the experience of the regime to its gendered nature, arguing that it is crucial to account for gendered differences in experiences of the Second World War and the Soviet regime and that such a process is bound to bring with it a re-evaluation of several generally accepted truths about that experience, including those relating to resistance or subjugation to the regime.

### *The theoretical framework of trauma*

Over the past 10-15 years, trauma has become a central conceptual framework in history, the social sciences, psychology, medicine, and literary studies when tackling the individual and cultural implications of phenomena that have caused long-term suffering manifested in the life of an individual or a group. Primary among the historical events that have been interpreted within the framework of trauma is the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup> More recent research in the field of trauma studies indicates a widening of the concept to include, on a more general level, events in history that can be characterized by the long-term presence of “political terror, systematic oppression, and genocide in former totalitarian and authoritative regimes”.<sup>9</sup> At the heart of the concept of trauma, traced back to Freud, is a hurtful, overwhelming and life-threatening (often catastrophic) event or situation that cannot be fully perceived at the moment of its occurrence. Of this event or situation there is no (proper) memory; it only manifests itself later via “traumatic re-experiencing”<sup>10</sup> that often appears in the form of involuntary recurring intrusive thoughts, images, backlashes, and nightmares<sup>11</sup> and which owes its disturbing and destructive impact largely to the fact that the trauma victim has no access to the primary experience that caused the trauma. Trauma symptoms also include a re-experiencing of the horrors of the past through internal shifts back in time and space (a failure to distinguish between the

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<sup>8</sup> Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, “Remembering Suffering: Trauma and History”, in *Contested Pasts. The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 98.

<sup>9</sup> Selma Leyersdorf et al, “Introduction. Trauma and life stories”, in *Trauma. Life Stories of Survivors*, ed. Kim Lacy Rodgers, Selma Leyersdorf and Graham Dawson (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins UP, 1996), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Cathy Caruth, “Trauma and Experience. Introduction”, in *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 4.

past and the present),<sup>12</sup> “the numbing of general responsiveness to the external world and a hyper-alertness to certain stimuli”<sup>13</sup> and “the loss of various motor skills and a general closing off of the spirit as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm”.<sup>14</sup> Trauma narratives are often characterized by loss of agency, the failure of the authors to be in control of their narrative and difficulties in communicating the experience (silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance, repression).<sup>15</sup> Trauma signals in oral narratives include a loss of emotional control, emotional detachment or numbness, repetitive reporting, and losing oneself in the traumatic event and intrusive images.<sup>16</sup>

### *Women and trauma: Imbi Paju's Memories Denied*

I have chosen, as the basis of discussion of the narrative possibilities and limits of trauma in Baltic women's narratives of the repressions of the Soviet regime, a 2005 documentary titled *Memories Denied* by an Estonian journalist, Imbi Paju. One objective of the film, which was first released in Finland, is to explain and outline to wider international audiences the horrendous and inhuman nature of the Soviet regime and the hurt it inflicted on Estonians. Another is to facilitate a discussion of the traumatic impact of the penal frameworks of the Soviet regime from a gendered point of view. In 2006, the author also published a book of the same title that continues the discussion of the themes and issues raised in the documentary. The film starts with a childhood memory of the director, whose mother was arrested in 1948 at the age of 18 together with her twin sister. Both girls were labelled as ‘bandits’, enemies of the Soviet regime, and deported to Siberia. Since her childhood, Imbi Paju has been haunted by the memory of her mother's nightmares “of Stalin's forced labour camps and the Soviet soldiers who threatened her life [where] she was never able to return home to her mother”.<sup>17</sup> Imbi Paju adds: “Those dreams of my mother caused me great distress. /.../ the forced labour camps and death camps filtered into my subconscious through my mother's dreams.”<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Shosana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 14–15.

<sup>13</sup> Leyersdorf et al, “Introduction. Trauma and life stories”, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Kai Erikson, “Notes on Trauma and Community”, in *Trauma. Explorations of Memory*, 184.

<sup>15</sup> Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 3, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Gadi Benezer, “Trauma Signals in Life Stories”, in *Trauma. Life Stories of Survivors*, 34–35.

<sup>17</sup> Imbi Paju, *Memories Denied* (Tallinn: Allfilm, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Although not exclusively, Paju's documentary (where she is also present throughout as the narrating voice and as the interviewer) focuses on her mother's and aunt's experiences of the repressions of the Soviet regime.

In addition, the documentary includes various Estonian women's narratives of their arrest, prolonged psychological and physical violence, and deportation. Yet the author claims at the beginning of the film featuring almost exclusively women's stories that "this ... is the untold story of *all* Estonian society, a story of sadness, arbitrary power, images of violence – a puzzle".<sup>19</sup> Paju's emphasis on women's narratives and her firm belief that despite the thousands of narratives focusing on the repressions of the Soviet regime in the archives and their publications in various monumental volumes it is still justified to speak of a crucial body of "untold stories" in relation to the regime, makes her documentary a good basis for a discussion of the effects of the penal frameworks of the Soviet regime from gendered point of view. However, although mediating women's experience of the repressions of the regime has clearly been one of the main objectives of the documentary, the author addresses the issue of the gendering of the (traumatic) experience of the repressions only on the very last pages of her book. Here, she asserts that "women had to be exterminated [by the regime as] the bearers of life, and under patriarchal principles, as the property of the enemy", [yet n]ot a single historian has compiled a complete list of the women exterminated during the Soviet occupation".<sup>20</sup>

Paju's documentary as well as her book places the discussion of (women's) experience of the repressions of the Soviet regime quite clearly in the framework of trauma. Paju argues that the hurtfulness of the past, unless it is properly attended to, can be transmitted to future generations, and it is for the sake of "more peaceful and happier memory"<sup>21</sup> that it is necessary to attempt an articulation of the experience. Such a position runs against the usual manner of tackling the repressions in several significant ways.

Firstly, the experience of the repressions of the Soviet regime is not usually tackled in personal narratives as constituting long-lasting damage to the lives of the victims of repressions. Presenting oneself as a successful survivor of the regime is a vital feature of such kinds of personal narratives, emphasizing that despite the horrendous and extensive nature of the repressions, the goal of the penal practices of the Soviet regime – to extinguish national identity, culture,

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., my italics.

<sup>20</sup> Imbi Paju, *Tõrjutud mälestused* (Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, 2007), 268.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 270.

community and a belief in democratic values – was not realized. Representing the experience of the repressions of the regime as traumatic would mean to admit to being victimized by the experience, to being (at least partially) unable to cope with it. In her documentary, Imbi Paju seeks to initiate the process of coming to terms with such an experience – one which could not be successfully coped with earlier on, due to the absence of emphatic space where hurtful experience could be unravelled, made sense of and overcome. Using her own family experience as a case study, Paju shows how behind an apparently more or less smoothly proceeding everyday life the hurtfulness of the past is still looming, finding its way into her mother's dreams, making the daughter as a child insecure and bringing about a feeling of helplessness. For Paju, getting her mother and her aunt to finally try to narrate their painful experience is a crucial step in the process of overcoming it and being able to leave the past behind.

Secondly, when it comes to women's experience of the repressions of the regime, mediating it can become problematic when it concerns taboo subject areas, such as, for example, sexual violence or even physical violence with an implication of accompanying sexual violence or the threat of it. Paju's position on the extermination of women as "under patriarchal principles, the property of the enemy"<sup>22</sup> coincides with that of Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović who, focusing on wartime rape, views it as "a means for achieving aims which have nothing in common with sexuality" as the patriarchal value system sees women as the property of the male enemy who "should be used as an instrument to defeat the enemy [whom] the victim symbolizes".<sup>23</sup> Sexual violence against women as a repressive measure or as part of war activities has been viewed as serving the purposes of ethnic cleansing,<sup>24</sup> forced exile,<sup>25</sup> and a means of extorting a testimony or certain information after imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

In her documentary and in her book, Imbi Paju strives to create a space where experiences of such nature could be mediated. However, although the subject is implied, Paju never confronts anyone she interviews with a question

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>23</sup> Vesna Nikolić-Ristanović, "War and Violence Against Women," in *The Gendered New World Order: Militarism, Development, and the Environment*, ed. J. Turpin and A. Lorntzen (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), 197; see also Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, "'Other Things Happened to Women': World War II, Violence and Discourses of National Identity in *A Sound of the Past* by Käbi Laretei and *A Woman In Amber* by Agate Nesaule," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 34 (Fall 2003), 313-331.

<sup>24</sup> Nikolić-Ristanović, "War and Violence Against Women", 200-202.

<sup>25</sup> Katherine C. MacKinnon, "Comment: Theory is not a Luxury", in Dorina G. Dallmeyer, *Reconceiving Reality: Women and International Law* (New York: Asil, 1993), 88.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine Jolluck, *Gender, Identity and the Polish Experience of War 1939-1945* (UMI Dissertation Services, Ann Arbor: A Bell & Howell Company, 1995), 148.

directly concerning this issue. The film contains interviews of several women who were brought for interrogation to the infamous Patarei prison in Tallinn and subjected to psychological and sometimes also physical violence. The testimonies sometimes imply the possibility of sexual violence but this thematic thread is not pursued further in the documentary, and it is tackled in the book in a somewhat evasive manner. The testimonies of the author's mother and her aunt occasionally mention physical violence but do not touch upon the subject of sexual violence. There are, however, several instances in their testimonies when the narrative breaks down without the viewer of the documentary ever learning the reason for the difficulty or obstacle for mediating a certain experience as detailed information about the incident or situation in question is never revealed to the viewer. In the book Paju contends that although she has "unearthed the events of this period, [she] often feel[s] that [she does] not want to ask [her] mother about everything that happened; it is easier to deceive oneself with the hope that they were spared from the worst".<sup>27</sup>

In another interview with a woman who was severely beaten in prison with the aim of extorting a testimony, the victim appears to block off questions that could possibly concern the presence of sexual violence with irony toward the interrogators by humming a song parodying the Soviet authorities and making jokes about them. For example, she recounts an episode when, being beaten by the interrogating Soviet officials, she needed to go to the toilet and was accompanied there by one of the executive officers who also ordered her to leave the toilet door open. When recounting this doubtless painful and also humiliating episode the woman says that such behaviour by the official made her think of him as a "toilet general".<sup>28</sup>

How should one regard Paju's documentary strategy concerning repression-related sexual violence against women? On the one hand, Paju's oeuvre may be criticised for merely implying a subject area that may be of crucial importance for a full discussion of Estonian (and Baltic) women's experience of the Soviet repressions. One could argue that as long as women's experience of repression-related sexual violence is not publicly recognized as a relevant negative heritage of the regime and as long as there is no proper space for the mediation of such experience, it also cannot be overcome. On the other hand, avoidance of direct confrontation of the interviewed women with

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<sup>27</sup> Paju, *Tõrjutud mälestused*, 235.

<sup>28</sup> Paju, *Memories Denied*.

these issues is doubtless grounded on the author's wish to tackle the subject of hurtful repression experience without causing further harm or placing the interviewees in even more vulnerable positions by having them disclose their experiences. Just as Tiina Kirss reminds researchers of personal narratives of the ethical necessity of showing "a reverence for individual experience as it has been told and recorded",<sup>29</sup> Imbi Paju's texts are evidence of following similar ethical obligations in her interviewing strategies and ways of mediating the narratives in cinematographic format.

However, even if Paju's *Memories Denied* does not create a space for mediation of repression-related sexual violence against women as such, it manages to present the repression experience of women (often involving psychological and frequently also physical violence with an implication of sexual violence) as traumatic, both strongly gendering and refiguring the (popular) mode of treating the impact of the Soviet regime.<sup>30</sup> The characteristic features of trauma narratives, such as loss of agency, failure to be in control of the narrative, difficulties in communicating the experience,<sup>31</sup> loss of emotional control, emotional detachment or numbness, repetitive reporting, losing oneself in the traumatic event and intrusive images,<sup>32</sup> are present in most of the women's narratives presented in the film. However, Paju's main achievement is not presenting the narratives as traumatic, but her strong conviction that the hurtfulness of the repression experience needs to be made visible and that, for the sake of what she views as a healthy frame of memory, both painful and happy memories need to be facilitated. Within this framework, Paju emphasizes the need to pay attention to women's experiences, in particular the articulation of experiences – for which even today there is no proper space. Although Paju does not create such space visibly in her film, she certainly lays the foundations for its emergence. Most importantly, Paju's documentary oeuvre reconfigures the terms of survival, resistance and subjugation to the Soviet regime. Paju emphasizes that in order to recover from the nightmares of the past, it is crucial

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<sup>29</sup> Tiina Kirss, "Three Generations of Estonian Lives", in *She Who Remembers Survives*, ed. Tiina Kirss et al (Tartu: Tartu University Press), 114.

<sup>30</sup> For scholarly considerations of women's experience of the Second World War and the Soviet regime, including questions of trauma, see Kirss, "Three Generations of Estonian Lives", 112–143; Kurvet-Käosaar, "Other Things Happened to Women", 313–331; Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, "Imagining a hospitable community in the deportation and emigration narratives of Baltic women", in *Women's Life-Writing and Imagined Communities*, ed. Cynthia Huff (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 59–72; Vieda Skultans, *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 3, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Benezet, "Trauma Signals in Life Stories", 34–35.



to be able to openly recognize their existence. The pathways of female remembering that she unearths do not bypass the hurtfulness of the repression experience but rather seek to come to terms with it by articulation and the creation of reflective distance.

### ***Questions and Assignments***

- Can you think of any examples of the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of women's experience of a colonizing or totalitarian regime in formerly occupied/colonized countries? How is this manifested?
- Within the body of texts where women's experience is articulated, is it possible to speak of 'pathways of female remembering'? What are the characteristic features of such pathways?
- Does women's experience need facilitation similar to what Imbi Paju offers in her documentary, so that it will properly emerge? Examples could include projects of collecting women's life-stories, fiction, films, fine arts, exhibition projects, radio and TV programmes.
- Find an articulation of woman's experience of colonization and/or totalitarian regimes that can be regarded as traumatic, using the list of the characteristic features of trauma narratives included in my article and pursuing the provided references further if necessary. Make a list of narrative difficulties in your chosen material (the term 'narrative' is to be interpreted very flexibly). How does your chosen material reflect on the articulation of the traumatic experience as a step toward overcoming a hurtful past?
- For an alternative assignment that stays closer to the subject area of my article, repressions of the Soviet regime, read one Baltic woman's personal narrative concerning the repressions of the Soviet regime. (Collections of narratives in English include *We Sang Through Tears: stories of survival in Siberia* (Riga, Janis Roze publishers, 1999), *She Who Remembers Survives* (Tartu UP, 2004), *Carrying Linda's stones: an anthology of Estonian women's life stories* (Tallinn: Tallinn UP Press, 2006), *Estonian Life-Stories* (Forthcoming in 2009 from CEU UP)). How can you characterize

the repressions of the regime? Do you think the experience may have been traumatic? How is the experience that you think was traumatic for the author conveyed in the narrative? Does the narrative make visible a process of healing from the painful past and show how this process unfolded?

- Another assignment could include Imbi Paju's documentary *Memories Denied*. Watch the documentary, paying particular attention to the narrative of the director's mother and aunt. Make a list of narrative gaps, incoherencies, moments of silence, breaking off from the story. Make a list of events and phenomena that the director's mother and her aunt are able to narrate in a smooth and coherent way. Comparing the lists, make a diagram of the life span of the two women in relation to happy and painful events and their impact on their life. Use different colour pens or pencils. What is the dominating colour of their life? What does such a colour scheme tell us about the possibilities of healing from the wounds of the past?



## A Hybrid Female Image in Today's Hungary

Dóra Dezső



The female “Hungarian-like” dolman<sup>1</sup>

*With the first Hungarian braided dress I felt that my childhood dream came true. These garments provide a beautiful poise, and a woman can truly feel feminine in them.*<sup>2</sup>

Figure 7: Dolman, property of Katalin Hampel, published here with her permission.

### *Implications for teaching*

When exploring novel ways of teaching history and specifically connecting gender and empires, choosing as an entry-point seemingly humble objects, such as a piece of clothing, an everyday personal article, or a piece of furniture inherited from ancestors and still around will bring a new perspective into the classroom. While elevating such objects to the level of special artifacts worthy of historical interest and inquiry, one can employ new techniques in investigating women's role in history, and verify their involvement as active agents both in promoting or resisting dominant cultures and empires. By selecting the object of study one can blur the strict divide between public and private domains, and join the two spheres examining women's contribution to a specific historical period.

<sup>1</sup> Original paper copy received from its designer, Katalin Hampel on 27 November 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Quote from singer Olga Beregszászi, in *American Hungarian Panorama*, March-April 2006: 47.

These artifacts surround us, either in their original or remade forms, and are still being used, either in everyday life or on special occasions. Some of them melt into the environment, some seem to be out of context and definitely leave an impression, often perplexity, on us. Studying these visible but often overlooked objects through individual and group narrations can help us better comprehend how empires functioned starting from the personal level. Some of the related forgotten images re-emerge, as the example of the “Hungarian-like” dolman shows, with distinct meanings and identities constructed around them.

What is an interesting scholarly project while teaching and learning about empires and their gendered aspects, is to investigate how the constructed meanings and identities are formed by accepting certain imperial legacies and rejecting some others. By placing objects and women’s narration into an especially entangled rich history of a ‘nation’ which constantly fought with empires and at the same time subjugated other peoples, the researcher needs to have a critical look at how women acted in these dynamics and whether the Empires referred to existed or were only constructed in their memory as mythical ones. This method of inquiry can nicely complement a more traditional approach of archival research and studying contemporary materials, such as specific journals in the field of interest.

As a student of the post-graduate course “Women and Transnational Citizenship, Teaching Empires” I felt it an imperative that I choose an artifact that pertains to women and conduct interviews with women who use and produce these items. Hence I opened up space for women in my study so that they can construct a meaning for their objects and place themselves in this emerging space. In addition, I learnt to critically reflect on how an examination of imperial legacies and the underlying dynamics at play could enhance our understanding of the significance of clothing in historical contexts and could link up the present to the distant and recent pasts of a region which was dominated by numerous empires.

In my study I sought to examine how we can speak of our colonial and imperial past utilizing the concept of hybridity in connection with the emergence of the female “Hungarian-like” dolman.

## ***Introduction to the topic***

Accepting the notion of “dress as a social skin”<sup>3</sup> whereby the wearer communicates a message and the viewer perceives some, the dress is a symbol, “a language readable without words”,<sup>4</sup> which signifies gender, age, class, group identity and nationality to contemporaries, and which defines the political space. In recent years in Hungary, one can witness the revival of “Hungarian-like clothing”,<sup>5</sup> specifically a jacket, commonly called “Bocskai”.<sup>6</sup> Since it is a male jacket, I set out to investigate what women might wear as a matching complement to it. When doing some market research I came across the female variant, the female “Hungarian-like” dolman, though not as an exact complement. As the female jacket<sup>7</sup> reflected a troubling image to me, I looked into the history of this particular piece, the general significance of national attires and how its meaning is constructed at present.

I will argue that the creation of a “Hungarian-like” style has been a continuous and conscious effort from the nineteenth century onwards along the boundaries of cultures, relying on the concept of “hybridity” and the notion of “invention of tradition”. I will also reason why a national style might not be successful in gaining “nation-wide” support and acceptance and therefore, it is debateable if a “Hungarian” national costume might have ever existed.

## ***Dolman: Hybridity and invented tradition***

The piece of clothing in question, the dolman was once a Turkish item, which is now marked as “Hungarian”. In order to comprehend this phenomenon I draw on post-colonial theory and examine the concepts of “hybridity” and “Third Space”. Hybridity refers to “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization”.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from Professor Margarita Birriel, from her lecture of 3 November 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Lilla Tompos, *A díszmagyar: a magyar díszöltözet története* [The Hungarian full dress: the history of Hungarian festive clothing.] (Budapest: M. Mercurius, 2005), 25.

<sup>5</sup> I will use “Hungarian-like costume” for translating *magyaros viselet*, and “Hungarian” for *magyar*, stressing the process of traditionalizing involved.

<sup>6</sup> Named after a Hungarian nobleman, István Bocskai, Prince of Transylvania (1557-1606), the main characteristics of which is the elaborated Hungarian braiding (*zsinórozás*).

<sup>7</sup> See picture, a design by Katalin Hampel.

<sup>8</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2003), 118.

According to Homi Bhabha's theory, the contact zone is the Third Space of enunciation, the intervention of which

makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People.<sup>9</sup>

Moreover, Bhabha argues that

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.<sup>10</sup>

Thus in post-colonial discourse, it is questionable whether there is any culture that is original and pure, free from any influences, and it is similarly challenged whether historical identity is in fact homogenizing and unifying. Bhabha claims that hybridity has an ambivalent nature, it can reinforce as well as subvert the empire, as "the display of hybridity – its peculiar 'replication' – terrorizes authority with the ruse of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery".<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the 'in-between' Third Space where negotiations between two conflicting cultures take place can be a site for innovation as well, creating new identities.<sup>12</sup>

Following Bhabha's arguments, I can conclude that the Hungarian dolman was constructed in the 'in-between' space where two cultures met: the dominant Ottoman and the dominated Hungarian; the dolman was then appropriated and re-read.

Besides the concept of hybridization, I also reflected on Eric Hobsbawm's claim on invented traditions. Hobsbawm argues that "the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the 'invention of tradition'".<sup>13</sup> He defines the term as follows:

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<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 14.

“... ‘invented tradition’ is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both ‘traditions’ actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period [...] and establishing themselves with great rapidity.”<sup>14</sup>

Hobsbawm adds “... where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* [emphasis added] historic past”<sup>15</sup> in order for new social movements to legitimize themselves. Group identity can be manifested and reproduced by rituals, social practices, languages, and costumes. Hobsbawm dates tradition invention in Europe to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, thus it is an ongoing process even today, especially considering the disintegration of the “Soviet Empire” and the formation of new nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe. Still, the formation of national symbols, such as the flag, the anthem and the national costumes, can be dated to the nineteenth century in Western Europe, starting after the French Revolution and the industrialization process.

In addition to Hobsbawm’s claim, Nemes refers to Eley and Suny for an explanation of the construction of national culture as “a complex process of cultural innovation, involving hard ideological labour, careful propaganda, and a creative imagination”.<sup>16</sup> However, one needs to consider the fact that there are always various styles and cultures competing within a geographical area, later emerging as a nation-state. For example, between social classes it is difficult to state whether clothing style moved downwards or upwards within the social strata system. As Hajdu declares, the national costume “is a constructed attire reflecting the influence of state politics, with historical details and often utilizing folk costumes”,<sup>17</sup> thus inspired by peasant culture. At the same time, one might argue that the process of cultural innovation was often led by the aristocracy.

The invented national group identity communicated by, among others, its costume can serve various functions, of which two opposing meanings are either signifying dominance or resistance, or even both at the same time, depending on audience interpretation. These meanings can change over time, in diverse situations, signifying various messages. In the imperial context a hybrid

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Nemes, “The Politics of the Dance Floor: Culture and Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Hungary,” *Slavic Review* 60, no. 4 (2001): 806.

<sup>17</sup> Tamas Hajdu, *A kismagyar* [The Hungarian small dress] (Budapest: Magyar Ház, 2008), 33.



dress that has been nationalized could also be important in the deconstruction of an empire, if one follows Bhabha's theory of hybridization. With respect to Hungarian national costumes, there is a long tradition of resistance against empires, such as the Habsburg, Nazi and Soviet Empires, which I believe, continues today, against newer forms of empire, such as globalization and, perhaps, against the European Union.

### *Today's Female Dolman: Rejecting the Soviet Empire and Globalization*

In order to comprehend the current era, one needs to look back a bit in time, and to examine Hungary's state socialist period, during which, as a sharp opposition to the past, that is, the interwar period, high-class fashion was banned and the folk style in a very much adapted version became the regime-propagated national Hungarian costume. Upon the political changes of 1989 and dissolution of the Soviet Empire, the quality and content of the "national" was again changed: not by the new regime from top to bottom, but more as a result of some individuals' and small groups' activities, which reached back to the discontinued high-class fashion of the 1930s. Today one can feel lost between the two existing and contradicting Hungarian national costumes, that of the adapted folk style and that of high-class fashion, commonly referred to as *Bocskai*.

In this context I met with a popular women's fashion designer, Katalin Hampel, in her downtown Budapest design studio.<sup>18</sup> Hampel started off as a folk costume and antique dealer in the late 1980s, and she still owns a big collection of original Hungarian folk costumes. Her turn towards high-class Hungarian-like fashion and design, which she calls "national Hungarian", started when she purchased a set of tulip *soutaches* and applied these male jacket ornaments to a feminine-cut coat. Since then she consciously researches and designs Hungarian national attires for women with her small team. One of her creations is the piece I chose as a starting point for my research. According to Hampel, "the piece originating from the Turkish *caftan*, is a Hungarianized *dolman* shortened, in a feminine-cut, and richly ornamented with *soutaches*".

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<sup>18</sup> I conducted the interview with Katalin Hampel on 27 November 2008 in Budapest, Hungary.

It needs to be noted that while researching I found plenty of men's tailors offering *Bocskai* jackets, but hardly any women's ateliers offering Hungarian-style female garments, which I read clearly as a sign that the current situation differs greatly from the vibrant creative life of the 1930s; it seems that today the traditional style exists in relative isolation.

Thus clearly it is a hybrid born out of the Ottoman Empire's meeting with the Hungarian subjugated culture and later feminized by the designer. When re-reading a statement by one of Hampel's long-time clients, the singer Beregszászi, and when observing the selected piece of clothing, I noticed a recent hybrid, which emerges along gender boundaries. I consider this hybrid as an appropriation of the male suit, through which a redefined femininity is born in a feminized suit, which is modern as well as traditional, national as well as transnational.

As Hampel declares these national Hungarian costumes stand against the empire of globalization: "I consider it very important, that in our world of uninterceptable globalization and uniformity, we must preserve our national heritage and our Hungarian identity's treasure, the national costume."<sup>19</sup> I would add to globalization another potential empire, that of the European Union, since after Hungary's accession in 2004 national trends in representations visibly strengthened in the country and hence European integration can serve as an additional factor to resist. Hampel's design efforts aim at "smuggling in our great-grandmothers' lavender-smell elegance into our feast days",<sup>20</sup> as she would like to see all Hungarian persons in possession of a nice Hungarian-like costume, for festive occasions. In this statement one can feel a longing for the romantic past of the "happy times of peace" (*a boldog békeidők*) of 1867-1914, through a gendered memory, that of the great-grandmother. This romantic idealized world seen through a woman's eyes is regarded as the best period of the Habsburg Empire, during which the Hungarian nation prospered the most.

Hampel considers Klára Tüdös's<sup>21</sup> work as exemplary; she wishes to follow in her footsteps, using original ornament schemes for adorning the costumes, which, in contrast, always reflect contemporary fashion. However, in opposition to Tüdös, the designer cannot envisage mixing folk and high-class costumes, as "it would seem unnatural, since the form does not match the ornaments". She also thinks that wearing the Hungarian full dress<sup>22</sup> is already outdated and she equally critiques some other recent Bocskai jacket versions

<sup>19</sup> *Magyar nemzet*, 2005, <<http://www.hampelkati.com/newsite/img/hampel.html>> (accessed on 16 November 2008).

<sup>20</sup> *Sikerés Nők*, 2002/9: 35.

<sup>21</sup> Klára Tüdös was a leading Hungarian designer in the interwar period.

<sup>22</sup> 'Díszmagyar' is the full set of the high-class Hungarian costume, including not only clothing items such as the dolman and outer-coat, but also a hat with feathers, a sword with belt, and boots with spurs, and, for women, an additional apron and veil.

as too ostentatious, too theatrical. She believes in the principle: less is more, and prefers smaller, signal-like ornaments. Hampel's critical views on simply copying the national Hungarian style as it was at the turn of the century (the full dress) or in the 1930s (Tüdös's designs), reflect perhaps her intention to create a clear, pure version that fits the contemporary setting. In this sense her words resonate those of Ilona Farnadi in 1938,<sup>23</sup> when the idea was to create a modern Hungarian piece traditional "in overall effect" – yet again, a contradiction in itself.

Although most of Hampel's designs are better suited for special occasions, she is positive about the possibility of wearing, for example, a female suit, her Hungarian national braided jacket with jeans, tight pants and long boots as an everyday outfit, thus popularizing again this type of clothing in present-day Hungary. However, she produces only haute couture, highly priced pieces, thus not popularizing her designs for wider audiences as did Tüdös in the interwar period. Nevertheless, Hampel would like to see more education and promotion in order to get the Hungarian-like costume as well as the folk style accepted and appreciated widely, since she thinks today in Hungary everything is over-politicized and the Hungarian costumes have no value. In this respect I found the ambiguous point in the potential female clothing movement branded by Hampel's name: On the one hand, it fosters community and group cohesion, and should be appreciated for its achievements. Fashion proves to be an effective tool for networking and building cohesion and solidarity. On the other hand, in my opinion, Hampel's strategy of consciously promoting her designs with public life figures, including politicians, as salespersons, as opposed to professional models, will not yield results in terms of attracting nation-wide attention, support and creating a neutral market. I believe, if appropriated by political ideologies, the dress cannot achieve a wide consensus. While forming a group identity, various messages become attached to these garments, which will prevent others from entering and thus will lead to their exclusion. The inherently present contradiction in national culture formation will prevail and the quest for creating a Hungarian national costume is doomed to fail. When compared to the interwar period, when the fashion was backed by mainstream conservative rhetoric with the aim of popularizing the national style, contemporary national Hungarian female fashion seems to target a restricted group in relative political isolation. Today the message might be conceived as

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<sup>23</sup> Ilona Farnadi was a leading Hungarian designer in the interwar period.

“I am the elite and a woman”, and therefore indicates eligibility to appear in public space. The message may reflect conservative values and particularly on a person who might believe she belongs to the naturally selected group which has a mission, similar to the interwar period, and she has to carry out this mission, for which the female bodies are utilized to wear these messages.

### ***Conclusion***

In this article, I presented a piece of clothing and how it may transgress boundaries of ethnicity and social class, and receive various messages vis-à-vis empires along its historical route before arriving at gender transgression and picking up potential new meanings culminating in its present form. Based on the Hungarian-like dolman’s journey in time, one might argue that it may represent a longing for an Empire of Hungary which was lost or which never even existed, in its exposure to the other dominating cultures of the Ottoman, Habsburg, Nazi and Soviet Empires. At these ‘in-between’ meeting points of the Third Space, hybrids in the form of national attires are constructed, such as the Hungarian-like dolman, which can be used as tools, attached to women’s bodies to serve national political propaganda. At the same time, these hybrids implicitly represent how the traditional national transcends national boundaries while constantly being modernized and re-negotiated.

### ***Further use in the classroom***

Assignments similar to the one presented above can be targeted at post-graduate level, and also require inter-disciplinary research. Although outcomes will vary, such exercises can be useful in more homogeneous classes as well as in groups of diverse cultural background. On the one hand, in a homogeneous setting the teacher expects the students to have a shared historical and cultural knowledge nonetheless, the approaches and interpretations will likely differ and hence can form a good starting point for class discussion. On the other hand, in a multinational situation, where shared background is not possible, the various geographically and culturally remote examples can assist students in identifying parallel issues and underlying dilemmas present in all case studies and valid for all “imperial projects”.

Specific questions to address in connection with national costumes:

- Are there “national” and “national-like” costumes in your country?
- Can you trace their stories and development?
- In what particular situations is your national costume worn?  
By whom?
- Is there a female variant? If yes, in what ways is it different from or similar to the male form? Is there a different historical evolution for the female variant? If so, why do you think there is a “different story”?
- How can your national costume be viewed in its own social and political context?
- How does your national costume regulate political presence?
- What might be the messages an outsider, a foreigner would not be able to perceive when seeing your national costumes?

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## Empire and Colony: Translations that Matter

*Mary Clancy, Andrea Pető*



Figure 8:  
Coffee and map. Photograph by María Suárez Lafuente

This section of the book is a product of years of dialogue in the ATHENA3 thematic working group on teaching empires. The discussion of how concepts of empire and colony are translated into different languages, and understood in different geographical contexts, informs us about diverse historical constructs and interpretations of power. As in the text generally, authors identify and define concepts and terms in various ways. We hope that a questioning, open approach will encourage critical enquiry into the subject of gender and imperialism. In the following section, members of the working group discuss how key concepts are translated or understood or used in Dutch, Hungarian, Swedish, Italian, Irish, German, Spanish, Estonian contexts.

Dictionary definitions are a useful basis for a discursive analysis of the gendered meanings of empire. Such referencing resources are easily accessible in published and internet format and offer an important opportunity for analysis of guiding descriptions of empire. As the examples below report, conspicuous markers of empire include power, control, subjugation, and territorial acquisition. Empire is also about acquiescence, survival, subversion,

resistance. There is scope for comparative work across various national, linguistic, ideological, theoretical definitions as well as analysis of propagandist and derogatory constructions, such as 'evil empire'. For teachers and students, then, dictionary definitions offer an expansive discursive framework to situate discussions of gender and empire.

### ***Suggested exercises and possibilities***

1. Select a definition of empire. Invite students to write a short assignment or prepare a short presentation about its gendered nature. Share findings in the classroom and consider points of agreement, conflict and confusion. How does the relationship to empire influence perspective? Compare colonising and colonised perspectives.
2. Use the initial investigative exercise to frame an in-depth essay or examination of, for instance, gender and imperial power or gender, resistance and empire.
3. How do dictionary definitions of empire change over time and across ideological settings? How does tracking the theme of change, or the lack of change, inform our knowledge about empire, democracy, citizenship, gender, representative participation? How does such information vary in different European settings?
4. Apply dictionary or encyclopaedia definitions to women imperial rulers. How does the definition explain the life-story, as known, of the woman ruler under investigation?
5. Who writes dictionaries and encyclopaedias? Invite students to explore the gendered nature of conventional knowledge production.
6. Re-writing and re-framing: Invite students to construct definitions of empire from a gender perspective. Discuss why and how such definitions differ from formal, received definitions. What can we do with this new knowledge? How will we share this new knowledge?

### ***Colony (kolonie)***

In a literal sense the Dutch word 'kolonie' means 'settlement of people in a foreign country'. The word, however, is also used for settlements of, for example, paupers or sick children within the Netherlands. In addition it is used for a concentration of plants or animals. The word 'kolonie' appears in the name for the ministry that from 1806 until 1945 dealt with all matter relating to the Dutch colonies in Asia, Indonesia (Dutch East Indies), and in the Americas, Suriname and six islands in the Caribbean (together called Dutch West Indies). As an adjective, 'koloniaal' (or 'koloniale') is used for colonial history, for colonial policies and for everything related to Dutch colonial history. Sometimes the adjective 'koloniaal' is used as a noun to describe a Dutch person (often a soldier) who was part of Dutch colonial rule. The word is pejorative from a Dutch perspective: not because colonialism is bad, but because it can be used to indicate a certain narrowness of mind that some Dutch in the East Indies were supposed to show.

### ***Empire (rijk)***

The Dutch word 'rijk' is often used for other empires: the British Empire (het Britse rijk), the Roman Empire (het Romeinse rijk). For the Dutch empire the word used is 'koninkrijk' (Kingdom, but with a recognizable trace of 'rijk' in it). Adjectives related to 'rijk' are hardly ever used. Dutch historians speak about koloniale verhoudingen (Colonial relations) or sometimes koninkrijksrelaties (relations within the kingdom). The word imperialism can be translated into Dutch as 'imperialisme' (with the adjective 'imperialistisch(e)'). The word 'imperial' has no Dutch translation, the adjective imperialistisch(e) is derived from imperialism and has a meaning that focuses on the *intention* to rule the world. As such it is seen as a negative term indicating aggression and subjection. There have been some, although quite late, discussions among Dutch historians about whether Dutch colonial policies around 1900 resembled the (modern) imperialism that international historians have attributed to French and British colonial policies from 1860 onwards. The fact that this happened quite late is – according to Elsbeth Locher-Scholten – a reflection of the fact



that Dutch colonial rule was not part of a power struggle with Britain and France (the scramble for Africa) and that the intensification of Dutch colonial rule happened at a time when colonial policymakers were inventing a new discourse, known as the 'Ethical Policy', which was initiated in 1901 by the first government led by a Christian political party. The policy was based on the premise that the Dutch were repaying their debt to the Indonesian population by intensifying economic development and direct rule.

*Annika Olsson: Colony and empire in Swedish*

### ***Colony (Koloni)***

In the Swedish National Encyclopaedia: *Nationalencyklopedin* the word and concept *koloni* is described as a closed settlement or community, often used to describe a community in a foreign surrounding, but most commonly used to describe earlier European "possessions" all around the world during the era of European imperialism. As a word it derives from the Latin word *colonia*, something newly built and *colonus*, someone who cultivates. In an earlier version of the Swedish National Encyclopaedia, the *Nordisk Familjebok* (1876-1926), it also is made clear that *koloni* can be used to describe a settlement in a foreign country or in the home country, and that there are many different kinds of colonies that can be used for a wide range of purposes. The article mentions inner colonisation in Germany with the purpose of strengthening the German-speaking population in Prussia as one example. It also talks about colonies owned by farmers in the West Indies. In another important encyclopaedia in Sweden, the *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok*, the reader also gets to know that Sweden has had one *koloni*, New Sweden in North America.

### ***Empire (Imperium)***

In the Swedish National Encyclopaedia: *Nationalencyklopedin* the word and concept *imperium* is directly related to the Latin word *imperium*, which it derives from. Thereby it is also directly related to the Roman Empire. *Imperium* is described as a great power with interests all around the world and where the elite in power rule both over its own people and other people – who, consequently, are oppressed. It is also noted that the word can be and has been

used to describe great powers from ancient times up until today, mentioning the Soviet Union as the latest example.

The *Nordisk Familjebok* gives the reader a much richer story (and thereby also increases our understanding) of the word. The description starts with the Roman Empire and states that within this, Imperium represented the highest power – the power to rule over country and people, which also meant the power to go to war and to punish people.

In the *Svenska Akademiens Ordbok*, the word imperium is of course also related to the Latin word and the Roman Empire. But what is interesting is that in this article (written in the 1930s and probably not edited since that time) it is the British Empire that is mentioned as an important example of empires.

*Izabella Agárdi: Colony and empire in Hungarian*

### ***Colony (gyarmat)***

The definition goes as follows: a “gyarmat” is a “country that does not have state sovereignty or economic independence, but is under the rule and exploitative influence of some, usually far-away, state or states. It is defined as a politically and economically dependent country with no foreign administration and international representative body of its own. Its people usually did not enjoy the same rights as those of the colonizing empire.” The beginning of the liberation process is dated to 1776, thus connected to the *Declaration of Independence*, and held to have lasted into the twentieth century. “Gyarmat” however also has a resonance from the age of the Hungarian conquest, therefore indicating a string element of national culture in the term itself. It is also a name of a Hungarian tribe during the age of the conquest of the Carpathian basin (ninth century AD) and consequently it became a common name for Hungarian settlements, which in the meantime became villages and towns but retained “gyarmat” in their names – often located in the eastern part (today’s Romania) and the northern part (today’s Slovakia) of the former “Historical Hungary”. The family name “Gyarmati” also exists meaning “of/from the settlement Gyarmat”.

## *Empire (Birodalom)*

According to the Hungarian Concise Dictionary it is a state with a large territory unifying several countries under its rule. It has similar connotations to “gyarmatbirodalom” (roughly meaning colonial empire), which is the umbrella term for the latest historical forms of “complex state formations”, indicating the sum of the whole of the imperial country and its extended colonies. Among the empires arising before the “Great Explorations”, emphasis is usually given to Alexander the Great’s Hellenistic Empire, the Roman Empire and the Mongolian Empire. For the age of modernity the classical colonising empires are mentioned: Portugal, Spain, the British Commonwealth, France, Holland, Denmark, the Russian Empire and Germany. The term “világbirodalom” (global empire) is also used to designate an enormous military, political and economic unit keeping together many countries. In the Hungarian context, the term “birodalom” is often used in reference to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1867-1918), which, although some scholarly revisions and revaluations have taken place, still often signifies a glorious age in much of the national historical literature. Imperialism (“imperializmus”) is defined as the “capability” to organize an empire (“*birodalomszervező képesség*”), which hallmarked a new phase of development at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is often held to have economic motivations, to exploit cheap labour and natural reserves together with the opening up of new markets or political ideologies such as nationalism, racism and a striving for international hegemony. It is interchangeably used with the term colonialism (“gyarmatosítás”), and the historical phenomenon it designates is considered to have ended, “after which” those countries that developed later but faster also aspired to have their shares of the world economy and colonial lands. An intriguing account from the early twentieth century mentions the term “Hungarian imperialism”, which at the time meant the imperative “to establish Hungarian supremacy within the borders of Hungary as well as within the Monarchy” – which, in turn, would then enable Hungarian expansion in the Balkans. This was borrowed from a strand of the “Millennium discourse” which saw two ways out of the dualist system Hungary was a part of: political dissolution or political domination ensured by “national greatness”. The basis of this imperial aspiration is however connected to national discipline. Later, imperialism, especially during the forty years of state socialism, based on Lenin’s definition, meant a solely

negative product of Western capitalism and was juxtaposed with the ideal Eastern socialist internationalism and the brotherhood of neighbouring people's republics who *share* the same political, economic and military system. Since the transitions, however, "Soviet imperialism" has been used here and there (mostly on less scholarly forums) to refer to the hegemony of the Soviet Union between 1948 and 1989 in the Central Eastern European region.

*Francesca Setzu: Colony and empire in Italian*

### ***Colony (colonia)***

The *Enciclopedia Treccani*, the most important Italian encyclopaedia, describes the word and the concept of colony as European occupation/ domination/ exploitation of African countries, generally of countries considered "other" and/or "inferior". In the Modern Age the description of colony starts with the discovery of the Americas (1492) by Christopher Columbus. Later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Britain, France and The Netherlands imposed their legal, political, social and moral views on various countries around the world. At the end of the nineteenth century, Germany, Belgium and Italy participated in colonial games, but their presence is portrayed as marginal in the context of the era of Imperialism.

### ***Empire (impero)***

From the Latin "*Imperare*" (*to prepare in relation to/ to command*), the word *Empire* is used to describe a system of supreme and absolute sovereignty in which a state claims possession over regions and people outside its own boundaries considered backward and in need of guidance, often in order to facilitate economic exploitation of the resources of countries inhabited by "others". The examples mentioned are always British, French or Dutch. The Italian Empire is not considered important and, as the historian Angelo Del Boca pointed out, when it is cited, the Italian imperialism is often marked by "the myth of benign Italian colonisation" ("*italiani brava gente*"). The crimes and the injustices of Italian imperialism have recently been investigated by historians such as Del Boca.

***Impireacht (empire); coilíneacht (colony)***

Definitions of empire in the Oxford English Dictionary (1961, c1933, Vol.3) offer important information about corrupt forms, such as *emperale* for emperor, and *emperish*, to ‘make worse, impair, enfeeble’ – hence Emperishing. At the outset, then, the reader learns of the corrupt, the obsolete and the negative as defining concepts of empire. Perhaps that is a good place to start for, invariably, empires do perish. Such readings are against the grain, so to speak, for mostly the OED’s dense columns defining the British Empire are imbued with nationalistic pride. One entry describes the empire as ‘a world-wide Venice with the sea for streets’, promoting a romantic and elitist construct instead of the political, social and military phenomenon that it then was, still thinking expansion. Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, dictionary spin notwithstanding, the British Empire was already creaking and cracking. So, a dictionary foraging exercise, then, opens up interesting paths to understanding the fabrication and realities of ideals and representations. In the case of Ireland, situated in a British imperialist association for about 800 years, how to use formal dictionary definitions to advance knowledge might appear ambitious. There is, for instance, extensive analysis – academic, popular and propagandist – justifying and contesting this long-standing imperial relationship. However, in observing how meanings are lost, extended, changed or become outmoded, there is space to examine how definitions and meanings are gendered. It is at this point that we start to generate new knowledge.

The various terms used through the centuries to describe the ruler and the ruled, for instance, suggest useful imaginative space for students to consider gender matters. Terms (not in chronological order) include: colony, kingdom (ríocht), Union (referring to an Act of 1800), dominion, Commonwealth, province, British Isles. One basic exercise, for instance, could ask about the legislative equality provided for or prevented under various constitutional or imperial constructs. Symbolic representations, found in poetry, song and drama in particular, situated Ireland as a woman, young, old, mothering, dejected, inspirational, a long-standing device in propagandist, anti-imperialist writings. There is obvious research scope to consider how gendered symbolic definitions helped to shape expectations and conditions for women as citizens, in imperial and post-imperial (post-1920s) contexts.

Finally, it is important to explore how definitions tell of the gender of the ruler. How may a woman ruler 'lord it over'? How does the gender of the ruler fit the definitions offered of 'emperor' 'empire' 'imperial' and 'imperialist'? How is an 'empress' defined? The Oxford English Dictionary defines Empress as 1. 'The consort of an emperor. Also, a female sovereign having the rank equivalent to that of an emperor' and 2. 'A female potentate exercising supreme or absolute power'. The Concise Dictionary also offers 'wife of emperor' as its leading definition. Similarly, in the Irish language, 'banríon' (queen) is an amalgam of 'bean' (woman) and 'rí' (king). A bi-lingual approach prompts further questions. Is the language of the subjected nation or region emancipatory in a way that the language of empire is not, for example? How do they differ? Such questions, of long interest to historians, could usefully open up discussion in the classroom. The multiple identities and roles of Queen Victoria, in power during conspicuous years of empire from 1837 to 1901, sees her acquire the title Empress of India in 1876. To map out the expanding roles of a powerful, unelected, woman ruler, operating at a time when the ruling elite deemed women citizens not fit to cast votes in Victoria's imperial parliament, is to map out a narrative of privileged agency. Dictionary definitions may not explain the energy, ambition and excess of Victoria but critical attention to formal definitions will stimulate thinking, and frameworks of enquiry, about how to approach questions of gender, imperialism and power.

*María S. Suárez Lafuente: **Colony and empire***

## **Empire**

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* in 1964 defined the term as "supreme and wide (political) dominion; absolute control; government in which sovereign is called emperor; territory of an emperor". The quotation given above is the first meaning that appears in the official definition of the concept we want to teach: Empire. Students are asked to analyze the nature of the words that make up the definition, in which nouns such as *dominion* and *control* are reinforced by *supreme* and *absolute*, leaving no doubt about the meaning of *empire*. In the second half of the definition we find that there is the possibility of an *emperor*, ruling according to the standards set in the previous sentences. It is easy to find examples of empires and sovereigns not only in history but also in

literature. Students can surely provide the names of a few empires/emperors and their deeds, which helps the class to find adjectives for the term and reflect on it. That done, the question is: can we say that there are empires/emperors in contemporary society? In order to answer this question we should restrict the territory to Western culture, because, as we shall see later, contemporary *empires* are heavily loaded with cultural inscriptions.

At first glance, (political) circumstances in the Western world do not comply with the definition of *empire*: neither *supreme dominion* nor *absolute control* can be sustained throughout. But further critical developments of the concept have made the word *empire* evolve into *imperialist*, which widens the range of influence of the term and also its possibilities of action. Students should ponder on the change implied in moving from the noun *empire* to the adjective *imperialist*, and we should make them notice that while the first is a given, the second is, precisely, that given “in movement”, enacted by a subject with a will to dominate and control. This will to enact the *empire* is so deeply inscribed in Western culture that it surfaces already in the first written texts, in the dichotomist “reading” of the world, where one sex, one attitude, one belief or one race prevails over another. The fact that everybody wants to be in the empowered part of the dichotomy accounts for the development of myths, genesis and otherwise, that will naturalize the imperialist idea. This is a good moment to make students reflect on their own notions of superiority in respect to nation, language, religion or genealogy, since these are the pillars of imperialism, colonialism and their derivatives.

Sabine Grenz: *Colony and empire in German*

### *Colony (Kolonie)*

The term is often used as “settlement”, as a description of a group of foreigners, and in Biology as settlement of organisms. Mostly, it is used in its political and historical sense referring to the overseas colonies in Africa and Asia.

### *Empire (Reich)*

The term “empire” can be translated as “Empire”, “Reich” and “Imperium”. The term “Empire” is used for the French or British Empire – pronounced

either as in French or as in English. Other than that, in German the term “Reich” is used. The word has a Celtic origin meaning “king” or “kingdom”. According to the German dictionary Brockhaus the idea of the term “Reich” is based on assumptions that construct a certain realm as universal, as a major order and as related to a distinct tradition. As such it is used for the Holy Roman Empire. “Deutsches Reich” became the official name for the German state founded in 1871. Until 1918 it consisted of twenty-two monarchies, three republican states and the Alsace. During the Weimar Republic the German Reich consisted of eighteen states that formally existed during the so-called Third Reich that lasted until 1945. The term “Imperium” is used for a big commercial organization.

*Leena Kurvet-Käosaar: Colony and empire in Estonian*

### ***Colony (koloonia)***

The first provided definition of the word, with reference to antiquity, is simply ‘settlement’. The second definition is “a country (or territory) that has been subjugated by another usually economically and socio-culturally more developed country, the natural and human resources of which are exploited by the colonizing country [that] has complete legal, civil and military power over the colonized country”. Colonized countries are divided into those where the colonizing culture has made indigenous population and culture extinct (e.g. the colonies of Great Britain in North America and Australia) and countries that became valuable places for exporting certain natural resources (precious metals, spices), such as India in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and most African countries between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, with colonial rule having a devastating effect on economic and socio-political development. In addition, a number of countries (e.g. Afghanistan, China, Turkey in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) can be characterized as half-colonies. The third definition refers to a group of people of one nationality living in a foreign country. In popular usage, the Soviet regime is not much related to postcolonial framework, but it has been viewed within this theoretical framework by literary scholars, and even a new term, soc-colonialism (in Estonian *sotskolonialism*), has been coined. Another term applied to Estonian culture that relates to (post)colonialism is that of self-colonization



(in Estonian enesekolonisatsioon), used to characterize certain distancing and partially also condescending tendencies toward native culture and the idealization of European culture among early twentieth-century Estonian intellectuals.

### ***Empire (impeerium)***

The initial reference is to the source of the term, *Imperium Romanum*, explained as “unlimited power over the subjects and citizens of the states, antonym of potestas” that relies on law and justice. The more general meaning refers to a world power, for example, the British Empire. Imperialism is defined as an attempt of one country to rule over the others/to rule the world via political, economic or national factors (examples include the Roman Empire and the empire of Alexander the Great) but also as a phenomenon characteristic of late nineteenth-century capitalism, when the great powers of the world made remarkable efforts relating to the monopolistic status of capital in some parts of the world or a continent. The imperialist policies of the great powers are listed as one of the causes of World War I. During the Soviet era, the definition of imperialism was based on Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, criticising monopolistic capitalism as an economic-political regime based on the exploitation of the working class as well as the peasants, the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia, juxtaposed with communism that is based on the shared values of different classes within society and where no exploitation takes place. Nowadays, the terms ‘Russian Empire’ and ‘the Soviet Empire’ are in popular and to a certain extent also in professional usage.

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# Teaching Empires

How to deal with gender, women, gender roles, feminism and gender equality in teaching practices? The ATHENA thematic network brings together specialists in women's and gender studies, feminist research, women's rights, gender equality and diversity. In the book series 'Teaching with Gender' the partners in this network have collected articles on a wide range of teaching practices in the field of gender. The books in this series address challenges and possibilities of teaching about women and gender in a wide range of educational contexts. The authors discuss pedagogical, theoretical and political dimensions of learning and teaching on women and gender. The books contain teaching material, reflections on feminist pedagogies, practical discussions about the development of gender-sensitive curricula in specific fields. All books address the crucial aspects of education in Europe today: increasing international mobility, growing importance of interdisciplinarity and the many practices of life-long learning and training that take place outside the traditional programmes of higher education. These books will be indispensable tools for educators who take seriously the challenge of teaching with gender. (For titles see inside cover)

What is the relationship between gender and empire? How will a focus on gender generate new knowledge about histories of empire? The aim of *Teaching Empires* is to critically examine questions about imperial effort, as remembered, displayed, denied, mythologized or obscured in various European contexts. The book draws upon the research and teaching of scholars from across Europe and is suited to a range of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching settings. The authors show how to use art, film, novels, diaries, personal memories, textiles, household materials, museum artefacts and photographs in a range of imaginative and analytical articles, exercises and teaching assignments. There is an extensive bibliography and insightful discussion about how empire is defined in various countries. *Teaching Empires* is an important resource for teachers and students of gender studies who are interested in identifying new teaching approaches, fresh sources and generating new knowledge about complex territories of gender and empire.

The books are printed and also published online. Contact [athena@uu.nl](mailto:athena@uu.nl) or go to [www.athena3.org](http://www.athena3.org) or [www.erg.su.se/genusstudier](http://www.erg.su.se/genusstudier) to find out how to download or to order books from this series.

